



**COMUNICAÇÃO  
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**ES**  
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**ADVANCED PUBLIC RELATIONS STUDIES**  
*ESTUDOS EM RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS AVANÇADAS*

Editors | *Editores*

Teresa Ruão & Ana Belén Fernández-Souto

Journal Editor | *Diretor*

Moisés de Lemos Martins







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*Relações públicas em estratégias de growth hacking na comunicação digital: os estudos de caso da Wallapop, Westwing e Fotocasa*

Patricia Coll-Rubio & Josep Lluís Micó

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**ADVANCED PUBLIC RELATIONS: ENHANCING A  
REFLEXIVE AND EDUCATIONAL APPROACH**  
**RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS AVANÇADAS: FORTALECER UMA  
ABORDAGEM REFLEXIVA E EDUCACIONAL**

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This special volume of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal explores an approach to the advanced public relations studies. In order to help the reader to follow this vision on public relations (PR) – following Fombrun and Shanley’s advice in the article “What’s in a name? Reputation building and corporate strategy” (1990) –, these introductory remarks explain the meaning given to the concept and go back to PR essentials. To that end, Hutton’s 1999 text was taken as the reference paper to the definition of public relations as “managing strategic relationships” between organizations and stakeholders. Although it is a classic definition (Grunig & Todd, 1984), its holistic vision accommodates the most recent debates.

Following Hutton’s (1999) statement, then, this edition was designed to present a collection of articles on the studies of advanced public relations that seek a better understanding of the theory and practice of contemporary public relations, making possible some conclusions about PR research and profession in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. The purpose was to promote the debate on “the core of advanced public relations capabilities”, which, according to Verčič, Van Ruler, Bütschi e Flodin (2001, p. 380), are its *reflective* and *educational roles* (as pointed out in a study on PR in Europe). Thus, succeeding Verčič et al. (2001) proposal, this special volume discusses the ability of public relations to concur for the construction of socially relevant standards and values and for the communicative education of internal publics in contemporary organizations, as citizens within our communities. The aim of this publication was, than, to highlight, amongst traditional PR functions of management and communication planning, a stronger social dimension, which was entitled as “advanced”. To this purpose, another one was added: to explore linguistic and cultural idiosyncrasies, which resulted from the participation in this edition of researchers from different countries of the Ibero-American universe.

Advanced public relations then define the framework that was used to examine the role of PR in current organizations, exploring the available range of communication

techniques and tools, revisiting the strategic communication planning models in use to meet the public needs, or discovering the usefulness of the web channels as the core of new PR modalities, simultaneously personalized and global. In time of fast changes and amplified communication, it is important that the academy and public relations professionals continuously assess their activities and its consequences in organizations and societies. Looking at the contemporary communication environment, we undertake a reflective path that can help companies to achieve business goals, institutions to align with their public service functions, governments to develop participative decisions or audiences to create more critical thinking.

This line of thought was encouraged in the XIV edition of the AIRP Congress – the Association of Researchers in Public Relations of Spain –, held in April 2019 in Ponta Delgada at the University of the Azores, Portugal. The Communication and Society Research Centre (CECS) at the University of Minho was a partner in this initiative and this special volume of the *Comunicação e Sociedade* journal results from a selection of texts presented to the congress.

The AIRP meeting included participants from Spain, Portugal and Latin America, who exchanged ideas and experiences about the field in their countries, seeking to follow up the association's foundational objectives: to defend the scientific status of Public Relations, to promote the research in the field, to encourage the continuous training of professionals and to spread the knowledge produced in the area. These are purposes that can also be detected in the global mission of CECS, revealed in the concept that expresses its guiding mission: “producing knowledge; building communities”.

Of the papers presented at the congress, a set of articles was selected for its affinity with the concept of “advanced public relations”. These studies analyze the current use of classic public relations techniques, expressing the social and educational concerns of the field that drive organizational and community changes. The articles cover a wide range of topics, from strategic communication management to the exploration of relevant and current issues, such as corporate citizenship, forest fires, road prevention and drug use, lobbying in the European Union, promotion of the arts, or social networks.

The paper “The importance of personal branding as an element of public relations: an international experience”, written by Julinda Morales Cardoso, Carmen López de Aguilera and Beatriz Legerén Lago, opens the journal. This investigation examined the degree of knowledge of young people about personal branding and the importance of its management in the context of public relations. Although impressions' management, in particular image management, is an organizational concern that dates back to the 1950s, its application to personal branding is a much more recent phenomenon that seems to affect life in society (if not remember the growing phenomena of influencers or youtubers). This study reveals that young people are increasingly concerned with the topic, but differences were found between Portuguese and Spanish students.

Afterwards, the article “Comparative analysis of corporate communication management between companies and institutions: the Galician case” is presented. This study,

by Carmen Costa-Sánchez, José-Miguel Tüñez-López and María-Isabel Míguez-González, makes a comparison between the communication departments of public and private organizations in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, a geographic area far from the socio-economic and political centers in Spain. Considering that the analysis of organizations of smaller size and resources, or outside the main media flows, should not be excluded from the research agenda, the study finds that institutional communication has a more developed strategic dimension than that carried out by corporate communication departments. These data, which contradict other international studies, are most likely the result of a lack of perception of the limits between political and institutional communication within the organizations studied.

Following is the text “Communication and crisis management in Galician companies: study of its evolution in the last two years”, by Ana Belén Fernández-Souto, Montse Vázquez-Gestal and Iván Puentes-Rivera. The article explores the communication approach used by Galician companies classified as “highly polluting” in crisis situations. The objective of the investigation was to perform an x-ray of the use of crisis management techniques by these business organizations, to assess activity in this sector, as well as its evolution in recent years (2014-2016). The data show that communication and crisis management are still not a concern for these companies, whose stance remains reactive and not strategic.

Continuing on the theme of crisis management, the article “When the sender is the message: the communication of Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa about 2017 fires” can be found. Bianca Persici Toniolo and Gisela Gonçalves examine the official crisis communication from the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic during the forest fires that took place in the months of June and October of 2017. The research concluded that the Portuguese Presidency chose the *meaning management strategy*, combined with the *adjustment and repair information*, thus producing appropriate responses to the circumstances. However, it was observed that the effectiveness of this crisis communication is also related to the personal characteristics of the sender, the President, and the context variables, which were more relevant to crisis communication than the content of the messages themselves.

The article “The role of public relations professionals in corporate social responsibility: some notes from the Portuguese reality”, by Mafalda Eiró-Gomes and Ana Raposo, proposes the review of a classic PR area, asking new questions to current practices: are public relations professionals involved in decision-making processes on corporate citizenship or are they just called on to disseminate the practices of organizations at this level? Are organizations committed to corporate social responsibility or corporate citizenship? Responding to these concerns, the authors conclude in their study that the social (philanthropic) area seems to be still the most relevant in the organizations interviewed, although under strong reformulations. On the other hand, the concept of corporate citizenship is not largely used and communication professionals do not seem to assume responsibilities at a strategic level.

Still reviewing the founding areas of PR, Ana Almansa-Martínez and Elizabet Castilero-Ostio wrote the text: “Spanish lobbies listed in the European transparency register”. They conclude that lobbyists are still, currently, the main political agents of influence in the decision-making of different institutions. The investigation analyzed the composition and functioning of the 745 Spanish interest groups that are, at the date of the study, listed in the European Union Transparency Register. In this way, they sought to show the relevance of the influence of these groups on those responsible for the political decisions at the European Parliament.

In a very different approach, Maria Pilar Paricio Esteban, María Puchalt López and Sandra Femenia Almerich, concerned with the fact that Spain is among the European countries with the highest road accidents due to drug use, wrote about their study: “Public relations and campaigns about road safety and drug use: evaluation of effectiveness in audiovisual media”. This research sought to measure the effectiveness of media relations when campaigning for road safety and drug free drive. The results showed that the low coverage of the theme and the lack of continuity have consequences on low agenda setting and low publicity, what does not seem to be in line with the objectives of the institutions.

In the next section, another text can be found about public relations in the cultural area: “Communication at the superior conservatories of music in Andalusia”. Written by Rosario Haro-Almansa and Guillermo van Zummeren-Moreno, the article focuses on the study of public relations activities carried out in the five Andalusian music conservatories, currently active (representing 16% of music teaching centers in the country). After analyzing the results, the authors concluded that, in the upper conservatories, there is an internal flow of communication equivalent to that of any educational institution, and that their actions in the external environment, and their commitment to the musical cultural heritage, make the communication developed by these centers in paradigms that generate and preserve culture and art.

From here, a set of articles were gathered on the use of communication and information technologies for the development of institutional and corporate communication strategies. The initial text was written by Emilia Smolak Lozano, Sara Balonas and Teresa Ruão – “Public relations strategies in social media: analysis of campaigns for social change in the education sector in Spain and Portugal” – and discusses the use of social networks in non-governmental organizations communication in the Iberian Peninsula. For this analysis, two case studies of social media campaigns were developed: #LeonorDejaLaEscuela from Fundación Secretariado Gitano, in Spain (2015), and #Amigo-Bagos-Douro da Associação Bagos de Ouro, in Portugal (2017). The first one was implemented on Twitter, while the second one used WhatsApp. The results demonstrate that social networks can play a fundamental role in non-profit communication, as they have enormous potential for lobbying, for creating partnerships, for raising funds, for mobilizing volunteers and for involving traditional media or the community.

The next article is entitled “The communication role: the use of social networking sites in primary health care” and is authored by Andreia Garcia and Mafalda Eiró-Gomes.

This is a study on the use of social networks in the health sector in Portugal, based on the analysis of the communicative behavior of local health units, which are public services of proximity integrated in the Portuguese national health service. The study looked to understand how the communication developed by these institutions, in particular the ones that use social networks, is contributing to the fulfillment of their missions. The conclusions show that these organizations do not truly recognize the value of communication, nor the potential of new channels as privileged means for communicating with their audiences. Social networks are still used as tools for disseminating information and not for interaction purposes.

In the following text, Verónica Altamirano-Benítez, Miguel Túnñez-López and María Fabiana Altamirano-Benítez studied “Tourism promotion on Twitter”, by the Ibero-American governments. According to the authors, even for economic reasons, the Ibero-American governments today are investing on communication to promote the country and to position themselves as tourist destinations through digital campaigns. In this context, the results of their analysis show that these states use Twitter as a platform for communication and tourism promotion, but still present unstructured guidelines for action and unclear messages, being therefore unable to strengthen their image and to positioning themselves as tourist destinations. From a tactical point of view, they recognize that the content update and relationship management are inconsistent, with periods of excessive presence in the networks and stages of abandonment, which has consequences for tourist participation rates and engagement achieved.

The last article is called “Public relations in growth hacking strategies in digital communication: the case studies of Wallapop, Westwing and Fotocasa”. Authored by Patricia Coll and Josep Lluís Micó this article analyzes the strategic planning of public relations of reference digital native brands in Barcelona, headquarters of the international technology fair “Mobile World Congress” and the fifth European center in number of startups. The results of the study show that the public relations actions of the analyzed brands integrate a broader marketing strategy, including the use of communication actions such as: advertising, content marketing and influence marketing. The study sought to develop knowledge about *growth hacking*, as a strategic focus of public relations, analyzing how this technique is prepared and implemented by native digital brands.

As can be seen by reading the articles mentioned, the “advanced capacity” of public relations, or its social mission, can be greatly enhanced by the combination of the study of communication practices with academic theorization, aiming to improve the comprehension of phenomena and to create a wide awareness of its effects in the public space.

Translation: Teresa Ruão and Ana Belén Fernández-Souto

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**THEMATIC ARTICLES | ARTIGOS TEMÁTICOS** 



## **THE IMPORTANCE OF PERSONAL BRANDING AS AN ELEMENT OF PUBLIC RELATIONS: AN INTERNATIONAL EXPERIENCE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present research examines the degree of knowledge that students of communication have on the subject of personal branding and on the importance of its management in the context of public relations. The personal brand concerns the perception that a person creates in the minds of others and is directly related to the ability to create bonds of an emotional nature and to establish relationships. The management of a personal brand does not mean designing and applying an egocentric strategy, but, rather, the search for the distinct characteristics of each person, according to parameters of authenticity and coherence, which are placed at everyone's service. Firstly, a literature review was conducted to determine the tools and resources that each person has to have to manage their personal brand. Then, a quantitative methodology was used, through the application of closed answer questionnaires, with which the opinions of three hundred students from three universities were collected – two Spanish and one Portuguese. The data analysis revealed a growing interest in the personal brands area and in the search for training on the subject. Portuguese students, in general, express a more defined and uniform opinion. Spanish students, on the other hand, show fewer agreeing perspectives.

### **KEYWORDS**

personal branding; communication; professional skills; knowledge; public relations

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## **A IMPORTÂNCIA DO PERSONAL BRANDING COMO ELEMENTO DE RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS: UMA EXPERIÊNCIA DE AVALIAÇÃO INTERNACIONAL**

### **RESUMO**

A presente investigação examina o grau de conhecimento que os estudantes de comunicação detêm sobre o assunto da marca pessoal (*personal branding*) e sobre a importância da sua gestão no contexto das relações públicas. A marca pessoal diz respeito à percepção que um indivíduo gera na mente de outros e está diretamente relacionada com a capacidade de criar vínculos

de natureza emocional e de estabelecer relacionamentos. A gestão de uma marca pessoal não significa desenhar e aplicar uma estratégia egocêntrica, mas, antes, a procura das características distintas de cada pessoa, de acordo com parâmetros de autenticidade e coerência, que são colocados ao serviço de todos. A partir de uma revisão da literatura, determinaram-se as ferramentas e os recursos de que cada indivíduo dispõe para gerir a sua marca pessoal. Em seguida, utilizou-se uma metodologia quantitativa, através da aplicação de questionários de resposta fechada, com os quais se recolheram as opiniões de trezentos estudantes de três universidades – duas espanholas e uma portuguesa. A análise dos dados revelou um interesse crescente na área das marcas pessoais e na procura de formação sobre o tema. Os estudantes portugueses, em geral, manifestam uma opinião mais definida e uniforme. Já os estudantes espanhóis mostram perspectivas menos concordantes.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

*personal branding; comunicação; competências profissionais; conhecimento; relações públicas*

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## INTRODUCTION

Personal branding has become a key tool in public relations. In this regard, the objective of this research is finding out the perception university students and future professionals have of it and the importance they give to the management of their personal brand.

The important social, economic and cultural changes that have taken place in the world of communication, which is increasingly more globalized and interconnected every day, are not external to the field of Public Relations. As a consequence, it is important to revise the different theories and practices that are carried out in this scope for guiding companies as well as professionals to achieve their aims (Arana, Vázquez & González, 2017; Kunsch, 2017). In fact, the new ways of consuming information and establishing relationships demand that the senders of messages make constant efforts to see their attempt at contact recognized and acknowledged (Arméndariz, 2015).

The modern human being is absorbed in a new social model which gives priority to the person and the collaborative communication either among professionals or between a company and its publics (Marfil-Carmona, Hergueta Covacho & Villalonga Gómez, 2015). The communicational monopoly enterprises used to have is no longer exclusive to them and people are the main characters now. Individuals have become their own companies and they must show their values and abilities, handling their own brand for achieving greater renown (Arana et al., 2017; Pérez Chavarria & Rodríguez Ruiz, 2012; Salas & Solanilla, 2018). This bidirectional relation of communication must be as efficient as possible due to the widespread growth of information, as well as it constitutes the foundation and one of the strategic tools of public relations (Nava, 2012).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Public relations constitute a process of continuous, dynamic and structured communication, in which it is important to consider that the results of communication

depend not only on what is said, but also on how it is said, when it is said and by whom it is said. Such aspects belong to the personal level and to the individual's essence as a brand. Among the several existing definitions of public relations, all authors agree with the idea that it is a planned and bidirectional subject that pursues the dialogue between speaker and receiver and it is based on pillars like transparency, research, integration, harmony, promotion and positioning (Cutlip, Center & Broom, 2001; González, 2013, 2016; Nava, 2012; Wilhelm, Ramírez & Sánchez, 2009; Xifra, 2005). Guerrero (2003) states that this discipline is defined as an interdisciplinary social communication as it receives nourishment from scopes like Anthropology, Sociology, Philosophy or Psychology. Moreover, its humanist aspect conditions a constant evolution and permits an enrichment from other areas without losing its essence.

Every organization or individual is formed by a group of significant elements that shape their identity, their personal brand. Those are characteristics that are identified by the receiver and that contribute to the making of a mental image by the receiver. That recreation made by the audience is composed by beliefs, values or attributes transmitted by the speaker and that provide them with the differentiation and identification (Capriotti, 2009). And it is precisely that thought created in the receiver that constitutes the essence of personal branding, term whose origin is set at the end of the last century in the United States and provided by Tom Peters:

until the beginning of this century there has not been produced any movement that had conceptually shaped this idea. It was Tom Peters in the United States who officially gave name to this way of understanding professional relationships. In August 1997, published in "Fast Company" magazine, an emblematic article which established the basic personal branding philosophy. (Pérez, 2012, p. 87)

In the article "The brand called you", Peters (1997) talks about how people, as well as companies, have their own brand and they are responsible for it. The author states that, in a world marked by competition, the best method for an individual to stand out is to manage personal careers as companies manage their products or services brands. Each person must recognize their identifying characteristics, their attributes and strengths so they can offer them to others. A person is no longer defined by their working position but by the projects they have and fulfil during their career. Everything the person does transmits their brand's value and nature.

Other reflections, as the importance of connecting with other people (Marcos, 2009) as well as satisfying their needs and requests (McNally & Speak, 2002), have been added to this definition. In essence, it consists of transmitting which one is the value proposal, that aspect that makes the person unique and that is based in elements such as authenticity or distinction (Arruda, 2009; Kaputa, 2005; Schawbel, 2011). Personal branding is the emotion produced in the mind of people we establish contact with and it is based on a responsible and individual process (Molares-Cardoso, 2016). Definitions do not differ a lot; they use different linguistics but the theme's heart has lots of common

points. Most of the acceptations are structured on two main pillars: the individual's value proposal and the connection established with the rest of people.

Andrés Pérez (2012) argues that “personal branding is in charge of discovering, choosing and giving visibility to those elements or attributes that make us desirable, trustworthy and finally chosen” (p. 83). The author believes that personal branding is the equivalent to the person's DNA, the aspect that makes people unique and that is also related with its developing stages: D goes for distinguish; N is related with the name and its fame and A is related with the analysis, attributes and authenticity. And it is precisely this essence or trace our image produces the one that creates the elemental personal branding pillar.

Personal branding synthesizes the way an individual introduces their to other people and the way they are seen by them, being closely related to the ability of creating emotional bonds through the relations established with them. As a consequence, the basis over personal brands are handled are visibility, perception, authenticity and singularity (Molares-Cardoso & Montero Campos, 2018). And the elements that form the individual's personal brand are: the physical appearance, the behaviour, the message, the networking or the kind of relations the individual establishes with other people and the individual's presences on the internet.

The personal branding is the result of a research process with the main purpose of reaching a presence that allows connecting with the audience, therefore it is possible to state that it is part of any public relations project (Jiménez-Morales, 2016; Xifra, 2007). This plan follows some steps for its execution and is implemented with a personal branding strategy. Each person must be able to discover who they are, what they can offer and through which ways they are going to transmit this information (Pérez, 2012; Recolons, 2014).

Thus, having into account the different theories for creating a personal branding plan (Brennan & Mattice, 2014; Khedher, 2014; Molares-Cardoso, 2017; Philbrick & Cleveland, 2015; Rampersad, 2008), it can be summed up in three steps from the individual's inside to outside:

1. knowledge and self-assessment: introspection, where the individual analyses their beliefs, values, abilities, competences and personal motivation;
2. strategy and diagnosis: external diagnosis in which it is possible to define the vision, mission, message, aims, audience, positioning and a plan of action;
3. communication and connection: definition of the ways and channels (online and offline) the message is going to be received, as well as defining the individual's visibility.

The value of a personal brand lies on the group of reactions a person causes in the audience they connects with. It is a tool of the public relations field as it comes from a strategic plan for obtaining a communication stream that allows positioning (Jiménez-Morales, 2016).

## METHODOLOGY

To develop this research, quantitative methodology was used, namely closed answer questionnaires and by taking the individual as the analysis unit, information from 300 university students attending their degrees in the communication field has been collected. The chosen universities were University of Vigo (Degree in Advertising and Public Relations), University of A Coruña (Degree in Audiovisual Communication and Degree in Administration and Business Management) and the University of Minho (Degree in Communication Sciences). This research (the data was collected between 2015 and 2018) is part of a wider research project that started in 2015 and is gathering data from other European and American universities.

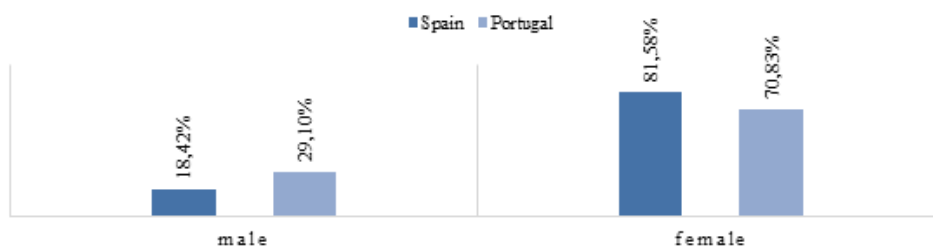
The survey was given to the students after they had a session in which the basic aspects of personal branding were explained. Regarding the content of the survey, apart from the personal information questions related with the age, gender and nationality, it was composed by 14 questions divided into three modules. From the first question to the 10<sup>th</sup> question, general aspects and personal branding elements were analysed. From 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup>, the five elements composing the personal brand, the importance of physical appearance and personal branding plan phases were revised. The last question dealt with the importance of acquiring knowledge about the topic for the professional future.

The possible answers were numbers in a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means “totally agree” or being the “most important”, and 5 means “disagree” or being the “less important”. Two of 14 questions are yes/no questions. The statistical analysis of the data provided the following results.

## RESULTS

The features of the sample show the most frequent age among the inquired was 21 in the Spanish students' case (42,11% of the sample), and 22 in the Portuguese students (41,67% of the sample). The age of the other students varies from 20 to 33 years, with residual percentages below 8%.

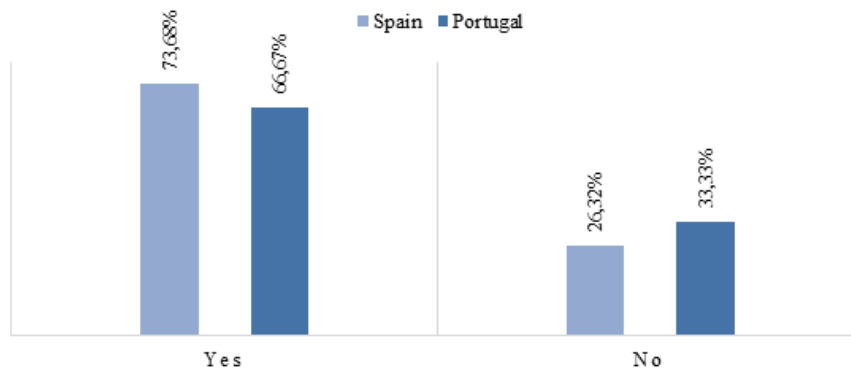
Dealing with gender, the wider presence of women in degrees related with communication is confirmed. In Spain and Portugal, male students representing the 18,42% and the 29,17% respectively (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Sample distribution by genre

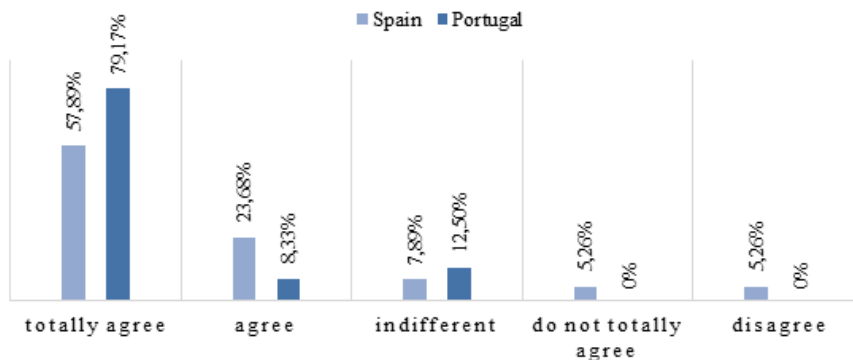
When it comes to the nationalities present in the sample, in Spain 100% are Spanish while in Portugal 83,3% are Portuguese, with 11,50% of Brazilian students and 4.17% of Cape Verdean students.

In the first question, which works as an introduction, students were asked, before the theoretical session they later had, if they had ever thought about the importance of personal branding and about the need of working their own personal brand at a personal and professional level. It was observed that a portion of the students in their last academic year had never thought about the importance of managing their personal brand (26,32% of the Spanish students and the 33,33% of the Portuguese students) (Graph 2).



Graph 2: The importance of personal branding and its managing

Even though an important percentage had not reflected about this topic before, the second question analysed if they consider they have a personal brand. The results showed responses of agreement: more than a half of the Spanish students totally agree with this statement and almost 80% of Portuguese students think the same too (Graph 3).

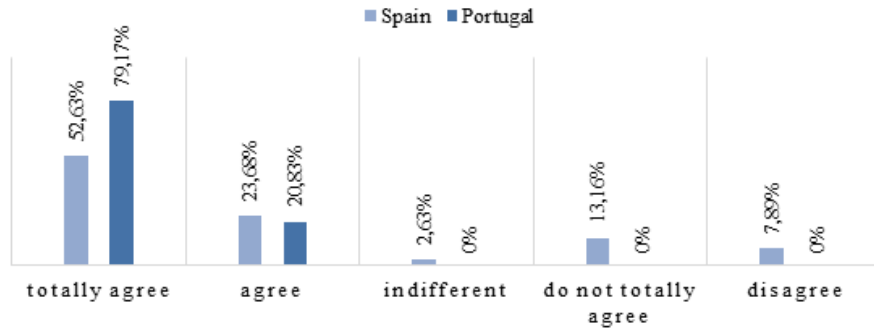


Graph 3: The individual has a personal brand

The third question focused on one of the personal branding's pillars and so students were asked about in which degree they agree with the statement: "personal branding is identifying which is our proposal of value and recognizing the aspect that makes us

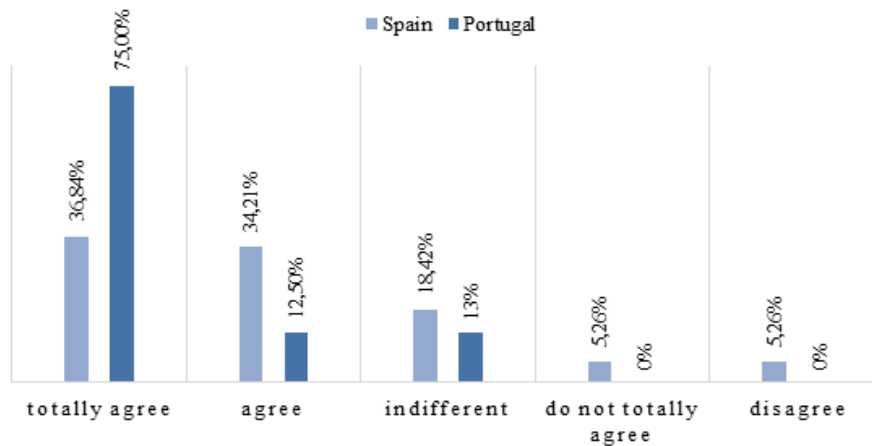


unique”. Portuguese students totally agree or just agree. Spaniards have a wider range of opinions: 52,63% of the students totally agree, however, it is important how students who do not totally agree and disagree represent the 23,68% of the sample (Graph 4).



Graph 4: Personal branding means identifying our value proposal

The fourth question analyses a misconception associated with personal branding. People tend to think that a person has several personal brands depending on the situation they deal with, however, there is just one personal brand, despite each individual being capable of assuming different roles. Portuguese students showed more agreement with this statement than Spanish students, who showed more variable percentages (Graph 5).

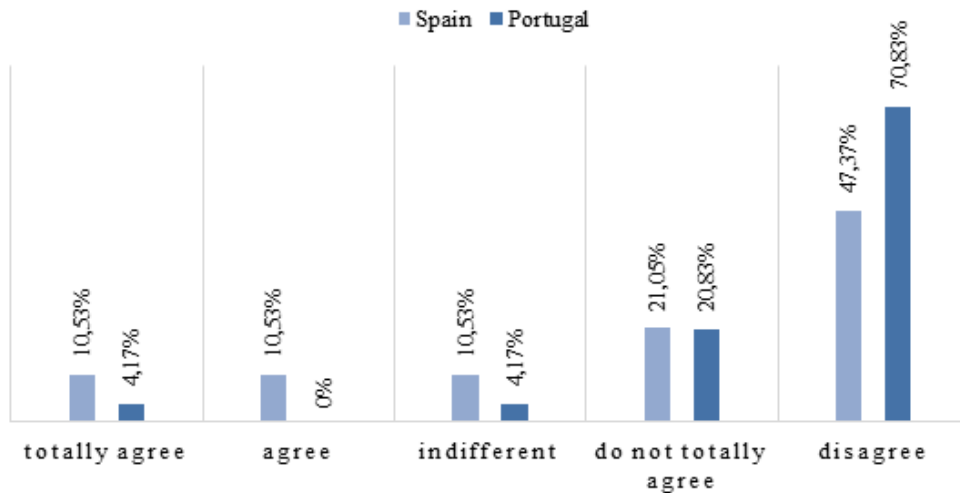


Graph 5: A person cannot be separated from the brand

The following three questions continued working on inexact perceptions about personal branding. With this purpose, the fifth question analysed the belief that only famous people should manage their personal brands. Spanish and Portuguese students alike show a high degree of disagreement: 63,16% of Spanish students totally disagree with this idea and 83,33% of Portuguese think the same. The sixth question was related to the previous and dealt with the statement that having a personal brand is linked with being

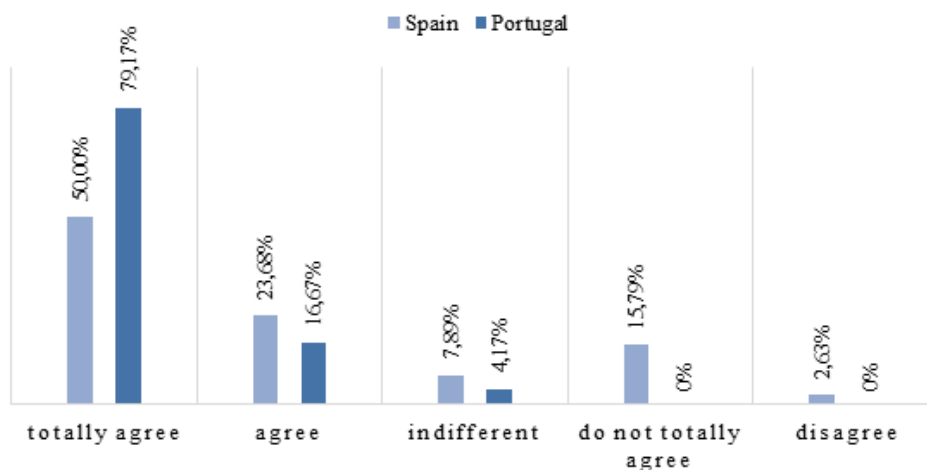
extravagant and 57,89% of Spanish students and 79,7% of Portuguese students totally disagree with it.

The seventh question referred to the idea that personal branding only applies on the individual's presence on social networks. A high disagreement is shown by Portuguese students (70,83%) while Spaniards show more diversity in their answers (Graph 6).



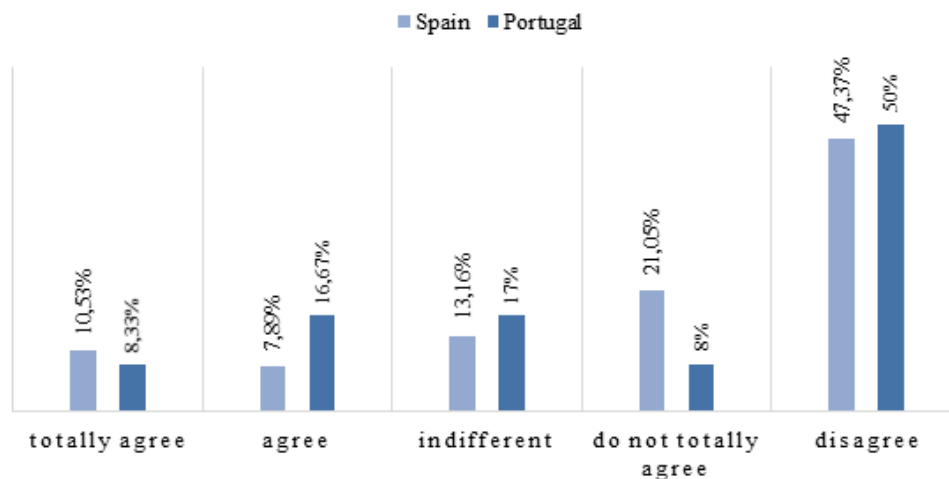
Graph 6: Personal branding is based exclusively on the usage of social networks

As a complement to this question, another question was raised, which sought to measure the degree of agreement with the statement: "my personal branding is formed by one online and offline part". Portuguese students displayed a higher percentage of agreement than Spanish who, although 50% totally agree with the idea, 15,79% do not totally agree and 2,63% disagree (Graph 7).



Graph 7: Personal branding is formed by an online and an offline part

The ninth question insisted again on the concept that all individuals have a personal brand. In this case, the question analysed the agreement with the sentence: “my personal brand does not exist until I start working on it” (Graph 8). Almost 50% of the students, Spanish and Portuguese alike, showed that they totally disagree with this statement. The personal brand does exist and the management of it constitutes an individual responsibility.

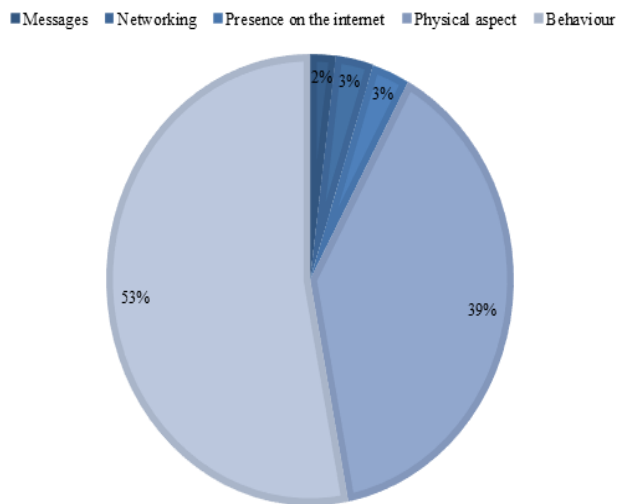


Graph 8: Personal brand does not exist until I start working on it

The 10<sup>th</sup> question was the last one from the first module of generic questions and it asked students about the level of agreement with the definition of personal brand as the trace or essence we leave on other people. In general terms, students showed their agreement with the hypothesis: 75% of the Portuguese students totally agree and the 25% left agree. In the case of the Spanish students, the percentages fluctuate more and 60,53% of students stated they totally agree, 23,68% agree, 2,63% are indifferent, 5,26% do not totally agree and 7,89% do not agree or disagree (Graph 8).

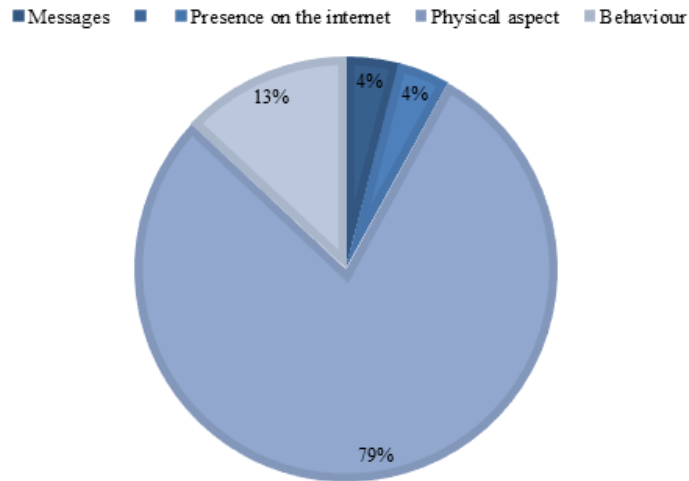
The 11<sup>th</sup> question dealt with personal branding components (physical appearance, behaviour/nonverbal communication, messages, networking and presence on the internet). Respondent students were asked to order these components from most important to less important. Results are presented by countries (Graph 9 and 10).

For the Spanish students the most important feature is behaviour (53%) followed by physical appearance (39%). Far from these percentages, it is possible to find the presence on the internet and networking with 3%, and messages represented by 2%.



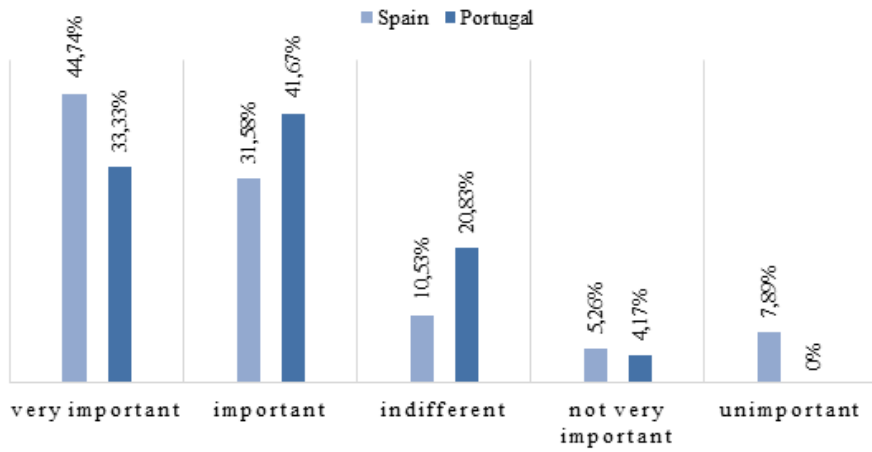
Graph 9: Most important feature in personal branding - Spain

For the Portuguese students, physical appearance is the most important element (79%), as behaviour gets second place in the list for 13% of the students. Regarding messages or the presence on the internet, just 4% consider them the most important point. It is worth mentioning that for any of the students asked networking is the most important feature in their personal brands.

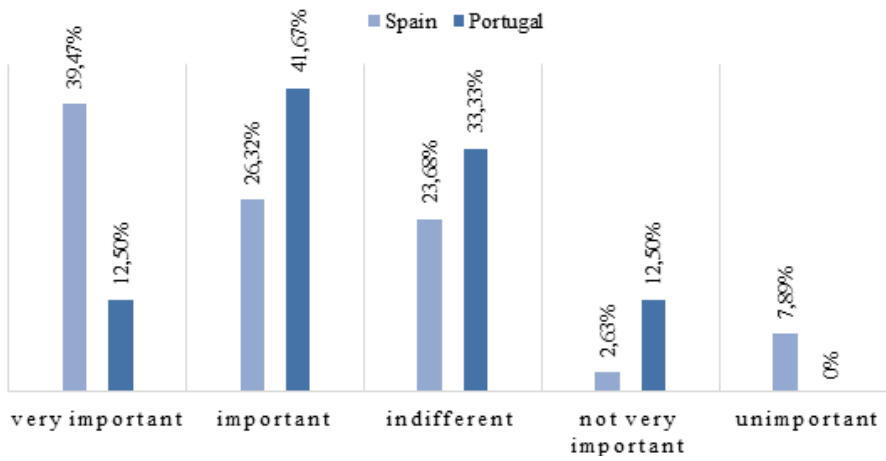


Graph 10: Most important element in personal branding

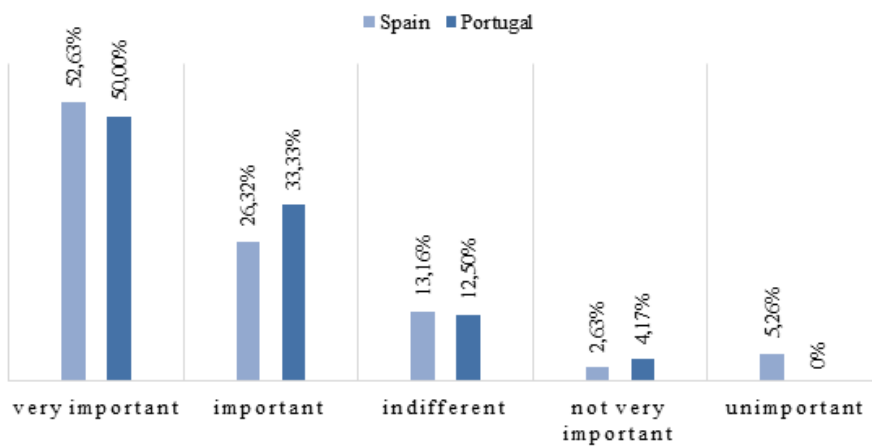
In question number 12, physical appearance theme was explored by asking students about how important they think knowledge about morphology is (knowing their body type or body shape), about harmony of colour (knowing which colour suits them better), about items of clothing (understanding what kind of clothing suits them better) and about the face (for understanding proportions and correcting, if necessary, imperfections). Results highlight that the acquisition of knowledge about any of the previous themes seems very important for the students (Graph 11, 12, 13 and 14).



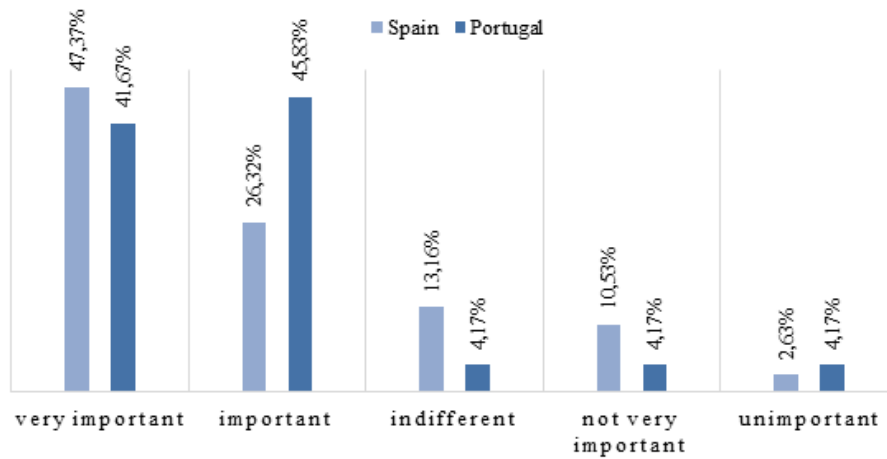
Graph 11: Importance of knowledge about morphology



Graph 12: Importance of knowledge about colour harmony

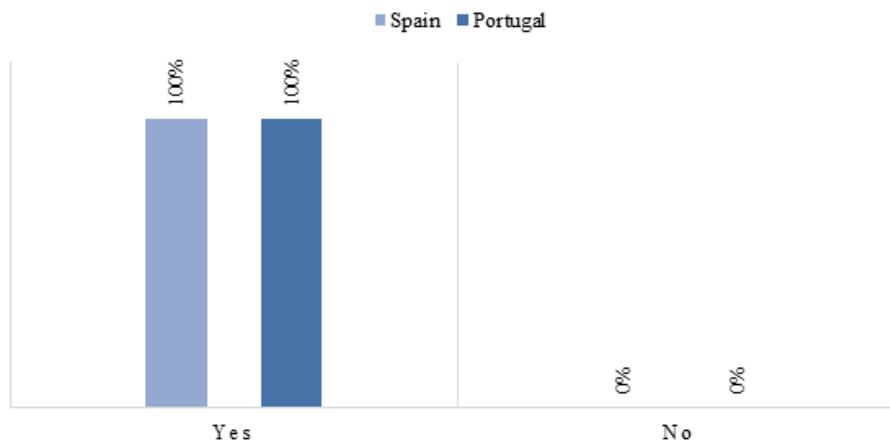


Graph 13: Importance of knowledge about clothing



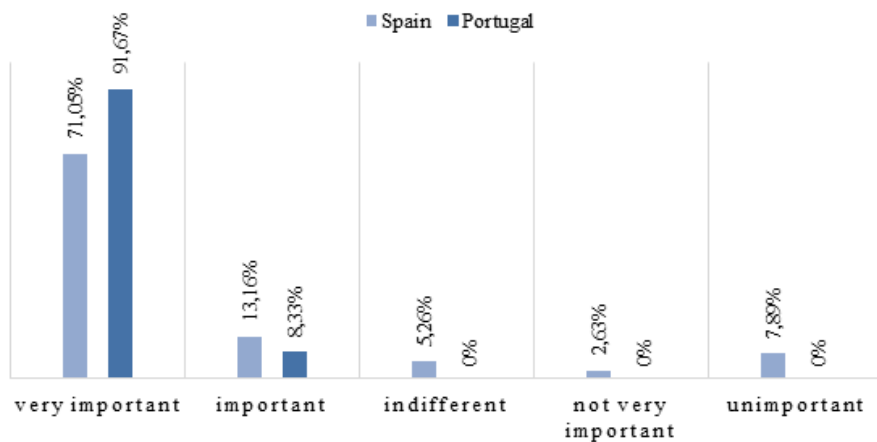
Graph 14: Importance of knowledge about the face

The next-to-last question focused around the idea of setting a plan of personal branding. The students' level of acceptance of the three phases for managing their personal brands previously established by experts was tested: the self-assessment, strategy and communication and 100% of the sample agreed (Graph 15).



Graph 15: Stages of a personal branding plan

Finally, in the last question, students were asked to value the importance that this kind of knowledge has for their personal and professional aims. Their answers showed representative percentages in very important and important sections, finding values over the 70% from the Spanish students sample and higher values than 90% from the Portuguese students.



Graph 16: The importance of personal branding

## CONCLUSIONS

Public relations strategies, in a global society, imply new visions and constant adaptation. The individual has become the protagonist and as such they must consider that in the current labour market, characterised by flexibility, they should act as their own company and manage their personal brand.

The management of an individual's personal branding is part of public relations as they have to establish a planned and bidirectional communication with the audience, in order to achieve certain degree of positioning and fame. Thus, the higher the level of knowledge about the basis and elements that shape the personal brand and about how to start and handle a personal branding plan, the higher the possibilities of establishing links with the audience.

In general terms, it is possible to see that students are aware of and agree with the existence of personal brands, but it can be highlighted that over 25% of students had not thought about the importance of personal branding and the needs of managing it until then.

Regarding the misconceptions associated with personal branding, Spanish students were more convinced that this concept should be pondered only by public figures. On the other hand, Portuguese students seem more aware that this is not the case and that management of personal branding is a responsibility of oneself. When analysing the concept of personal brands being something else than social media presence, 91,66% of Portuguese students agree and totally agree, while in the Spanish sample, these values represent 68,42%. This question is supported by the one following it, which analyses if personal branding is formed by an online and an offline part. Again, Portuguese students show a higher level of consciousness as samples do not present any percentage for the parameters do not totally agree and disagree, while Spanish students' answers present disagreement.

Dealing with which one is the most important element in personal branding, more than a half of the Spanish students consider it is behaviour, feature that is just supported

as the most important one by the 13% of Portuguese students, who consider physical appearance the most important characteristic for almost the 80% of them. By going deeper in the concepts of personal appearance and the importance of knowledge about its parameters, all students show interest in acquiring information about the type of body they have, the colours and items of clothing that suit them better as well as understanding the dimensional parameters of their face.

To sum up, Portuguese students are more aware of the importance of handling their personal branding so they show a higher level of coherence in their answers. On the other hand, Spanish students show interest in the topic but in a less defined way, presenting a higher level of contradiction in their answers. Whereby, it would be appropriate boosting and increasing personal branding education in the public relations field in order to allow the individual to manage their personal identity.

Translation: Julinda Molares-Cardoso, Carmen López de Aguilera and Beatriz Legerén Lago

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# **COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CORPORATE COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT BETWEEN COMPANIES AND INSTITUTIONS: THE GALICIAN CASE**

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## **ABSTRACT**

The study of communication as a professional activity is often conducted in the context of large organizations with multiple resources, mainly in companies. This investigation contradicts this trend and compares communication departments of public and private organizations, which are located in a geographical area far from Spain's socio-economic and political centres: the Autonomous Community of Galicia. In Europe, some important works have been carried out on the practice of organizational communication (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020), as well as in Spain (Dircom, 2015), which have become relevant references to the knowledge of trends applied to communication management. Even so, analysis that focuses on small-scale organizations or those away from decision-making centres are scarce. This research aims to fill this gap by focusing on organizations with different profiles and dimensions, based in the Autonomous Community of Galicia. The applied methodology, of a quantitative character, consisted mainly on surveys of communication officers from Galician public and private organizations. The results obtained showed that the public sector is the one that most communicates as a strategy and this is a conclusion capable of raising interest for future works.

## **KEYWORDS**

organizational communication; business communication; institutional communication; communication management; quantitative methodology

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# ANÁLISE COMPARATIVA DA GESTÃO DA COMUNICAÇÃO CORPORATIVA EM EMPRESAS E INSTITUIÇÕES: O CASO DA GALIZA

## RESUMO

O estudo da comunicação enquanto atividade profissional é frequentemente conduzido no contexto de grandes organizações com múltiplos recursos, principalmente em empresas. Esta investigação vem contrariar essa tendência e compara departamentos de comunicação de organizações públicas e privadas, que se situam numa área geográfica afastada dos núcleos socioeconómicos e políticos de Espanha: a Comunidade Autónoma da Galiza. Na Europa, têm vindo a realizar-se alguns trabalhos importantes sobre a prática da comunicação organizacional (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020), tal como em Espanha (Dircom, 2015), os quais se converteram em referências relevantes para o conhecimento das tendências aplicadas à gestão da comunicação. Ainda assim, as análises que se debruçam sobre organizações de pequena dimensão ou afastadas dos centros de decisão são escassas. A presente investigação pretende preencher esta lacuna ao incidir sobre organizações com diferentes perfis e dimensões, sediadas na Comunidade Autónoma da Galiza. A metodologia aplicada, de carácter quantitativo, privilegiou a realização de inquéritos a responsáveis de comunicação de organizações públicas e privadas galegas. Os resultados obtidos mostraram que o setor público é aquele que mais usa a comunicação enquanto estratégia e esta é uma conclusão capaz de suscitar o interesse para trabalhos futuros.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunicação organizacional; comunicação empresarial; comunicação institucional; gerenciamento de comunicação; metodologia quantitativa

## INTRODUCTION

The study of Organizational Communication trends, whether from the point of view of the evolution of the discipline, or through the analysis of professional characteristics, is of interest to help to understand the dynamics that describe the advancement of communication as a professional activity.

For this reason, some reference works that deal with this subject stand out. At the European level, it is important to refer the *European communication monitor*, an annual report that focuses on communication in Europe and whose last edition is from 2020 (Zerfass, Verhoeven, Moreno, Tench & Vercic, 2020). It is, therefore, a reference publication for any research that deals with the analysis of communication trends. In Spain, the work of Dircom stands out, either through the situation reports published every five years (Dircom, 2015), or through the *El estado de la comunicación en españa* (Dircom, 2018).

Despite these contributions, there are few studies that have as their object of study small or medium-sized organizations (Blay Arráez, 2010; Dueñas, 2016; Gómez, 2011; Iurcovich, 2012), or that are located outside business centres (Míguez -González, Costa-Sánchez & Tüñez-López, 2019).

This investigation seeks to broaden the knowledge in this field, by conducting an exploratory study that assumes that the diagnosis and the consequent knowledge of a closer reality can facilitate other research, as well as assist teaching in some disciplines. In this way, it is possible to contribute to the development of the productive fabric, promoting collaboration between the professional and academic context.

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PREVIOUS STUDIES AT SPAIN AND GALICIA**

The following literature review focuses on the state of business and institutional communication in Spain, with reference to recent empirical work. Since this work focuses on smaller organizations, based in less central regions, it starts out as a general analysis, later focusing in the specific context studied.

According to the most recent publication of the report *Estudio de la comunicación en España* (Dircom, 2018), which studies the figure and role of the communication professional in public and private environments – with data collected in 2017 –, the profile of the director of communication in Spain is a woman (56%), young (49% are between 30 and 45 years old), with experience (68% has more than ten years of professional experience in the field) and with a master's or postgraduate degree in Communication (47.5%), with the majority having a degree in Journalism (55.6%).

With regard to the work developed in the communication departments, the Dircom report (Dircom, 2018) describes differences in the perception of communication due to different organizational profiles, which is especially appropriate for this work. Thus, publicly traded companies and governmental organizations believe in the relevance of the media for their near future. Non-governmental Organizations (NGO), private entities, as well as the consultancy sector do not attach any importance to them.

Regarding the main functions of the communication departments, companies registered on the stock exchange favor financial communication and investor relations. Private organizations, for their part, highlight sponsorship, patronage, graphic design and photography. The communication agencies report, as usual tasks, the consultancy, counseling, training and account management of the main clients (47,1%), as well as the monitoring, measurement and evaluation activities. For government organizations, the communication department should be responsible for facilitating contacts with the media (15,8%) and for promoting relations with the community (15,8%), and NGO and associations also highlight the relationships with the community (36,8%).

Even so, online communication through social media is the function that is expected to further develop in the near future (62,5%). The topics that the Dircom (2018) report describes as important for this sector are: (1) the use of big data and algorithms for communication; (2) the integration of the organization's strategies with communication; and (3) the creation and management of quality content that is attractive to audiences. In a recent analysis of the communication departments of the main Spanish companies (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestalt, 2019), it was concluded that the average number of workers in these departments is higher when compared to smaller

organizations. The prevailing training is that of journalism. Regarding the main concerns of these professionals, intangible values of transparency, honesty or credibility in issues related to technological evolution (big data, mobile applications or information technologies) stand out.

The reality portrayed in that study stands very far from small or medium-sized companies, whose difficulties and problems were pointed out by some previous works (Blay Arráez, 2010; Carretón Ballester, 2010; Carrillo, Castillo & Gómez, 2005; Dueñas, 2016; Gómez, 2011; Iurcovich, 2012; Mayorga Escalada, 2014), namely:

- the absence of a communication department and the respective lack of professionalization of the activity;
- the lack of awareness about the importance of communication to achieve organizational goals;
- the lack of culture and experience in communication, which leads to the identification of communication as advertising, as commercial communication or as marketing;
- the absence of specialized professionals dedicated exclusively to the management of communication, likewise, that lack resources and budget to plan, implement and evaluate communication needs;
- little experience in communication issues, as well as ignorance of communication strategies and tools;
- the difficulty in creating news and, consequently, the low coverage and low impact on traditional media;
- the lack of vision about the activity itself and the difficulty in creating relationships with the public;
- the prioritization of external communication, linked to advertising or the organization's graphic identity, ignoring the weight of internal communication or social responsibility.

At the institutional level, existing research is less global and more adapted to unique institutional profiles, which makes comparison difficult. In this regard, several studies were carried out on the communication function, namely in the provincial and regional councils (Puentes-Rivera, 2017), in the City Councils (Ríos Martín, 2015; Rochera, Fernández Beltrán, Durán Mañes & Marín, 2013), in public bodies (Martínez-Solana, 2014), in public hospitals (Costa-Sánchez, 2012), in universities (García-Rivas, 2003); political leaders (Almansa-Martínez & Castillo-Esparcia 2014), in public television entities (Costa-Sánchez & Tüñez-López, 2017) and in institutions in general (Baamonde, Puentes-Rivera & Rúas, 2016; Tüñez-López, Costa-Sánchez & Míguez-González, 2018). Given the lack of an investigation that focuses on the institutional reality as a whole, it becomes more complex to find common denominators in this sector.

The analysis of the composition of public relations offices, as well as the academic profile of those responsible, is a constant in studies on communication in organizations. Designed to work independently from other management functions in organizations, public relations departments contribute, in the words of E-Grunig, A-Grunig and Aparecida Ferrari (2015), "to organizational effectiveness because they support organizations in building relational processes and in resolving conflicts with its audiences" (p. 4). As Van Ruller and Vercic (2003) pointed out, "public relations has a special interest in the major issues of society and addresses any problem from the perspective of the implications of organizational behavior in the public sphere and vice versa" (p. 167).



The proposal by E-Grunig et al. (2015) is that public relations should, therefore, be managed by a strategist and not by a technician, because:

the public relations sectors must have professionals trained in communication and with specializations that allow them to plan, coordinate, execute and evaluate public relations programs. Otherwise, the “dominant coalition” will not be able to achieve the strategic value of public relations for the organization’s business. (p. 5)

The data collected in Galicia, with regard to the business sector, showed that although Galician entrepreneurs rate the importance of communication as eight (on a scale of zero to 10), the reality is that only 52% of these companies have a communications director. The percentage of entities that resort to contracting external services is 58%, but communication budgets have been considerably reduced due to the economic crisis (Mundinova, 2013). Within Galician institutions (Baamonde et al., 2016), a greater importance of the communication function was observed, through the existence of own departments made up of one, two or three professionals, as well as the relevance attributed to the construction of communication models based on dialogue with the institutions audiences.

## METHODOLOGY

In order to carry out this study, a quantitative methodology was used, by means of online questionnaires, which were sent by email to the communication officers of companies and public institutions based in the Autonomous Community of Galicia.

To select the sample of companies to be contacted, the Ardán report, produced annually by the consortium of the Free Zone of Vigo (ZFV), was consulted. In this case, data from the 2016 Ardán report (ZFV, 2016) were collected, which includes a guide of more than 9.000 companies registered in Galicia, grouped into large, medium and small, according to the number of workers. Then, a sample of 200 responses was obtained in an exploratory study that covered the four areas of economic activity established by the Galician Institute of Statistics (primary, secondary sector, construction and services), as well as companies of different sizes, which varied from micro (with less than 10 employees) to large companies (with more than 250 employees).

To determine the institutions to be studied, the communication guide<sup>1</sup> issued by the regional government of the Xunta de Galicia was used, as well as the legislative rules on autonomous institutions and on the representation of the State Administration in Galicia (Organic Law No 1/1981). In a total of 426 organizations, a convenience sample was selected and 87 responses were validated to ensure that the institutions analyzed would cover at least 50% of the population.

The questionnaire was sent by email to the organizations that constituted the sample, from November 2016 to February 2017. It was a semi-structured survey, composed

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.xunta.gal/guia-da-comunicacion>

of multiple choice questions, divided into four sections, with a design similar to the survey implemented by Dircom's five-year reports (2015) (which allow the comparison of results between the context of Spain and Galicia), which was slightly modified to be applied at the institutional level (Table 1).

SECTIONS	DESCRIPTION/OBJECTIVES
Contact details and identification	It was collected data related to the contact details of the person who answered the questionnaire and the most important information about the company/institution
Communication function (R.Q.1)	It was intended to verify the existence of a specific department of communication, its denomination and that of its responsible
Communication awareness (R.Q.2)	It was asked about the importance of communication in the organization to know the corporate philosophy in this regard
Communication planning (R.Q.3)	As a key document of the communication department, it was sought to verify the existence of communication and crisis plans
Impact of the crisis (R.Q.4)	Attention was paid to the impact of the economic crisis on the communication function.

Table 1: Structure of the questionnaire

The sending of the questionnaire by email was complemented with telephone calls, with the aim of verifying the reception and ensuring its completion. The participation achieved was similar to that achieved in previous studies of similar themes (Dircom, 2015; Gómez, 2011; Dueñas, 2016), which sought to explore the situation of business and institutional communication in the Autonomous Community of Galicia, but focused on larger organizations (Mundinova, 2013), in a more limited way.

## RESULTS

### COMMUNICATION FUNCTION

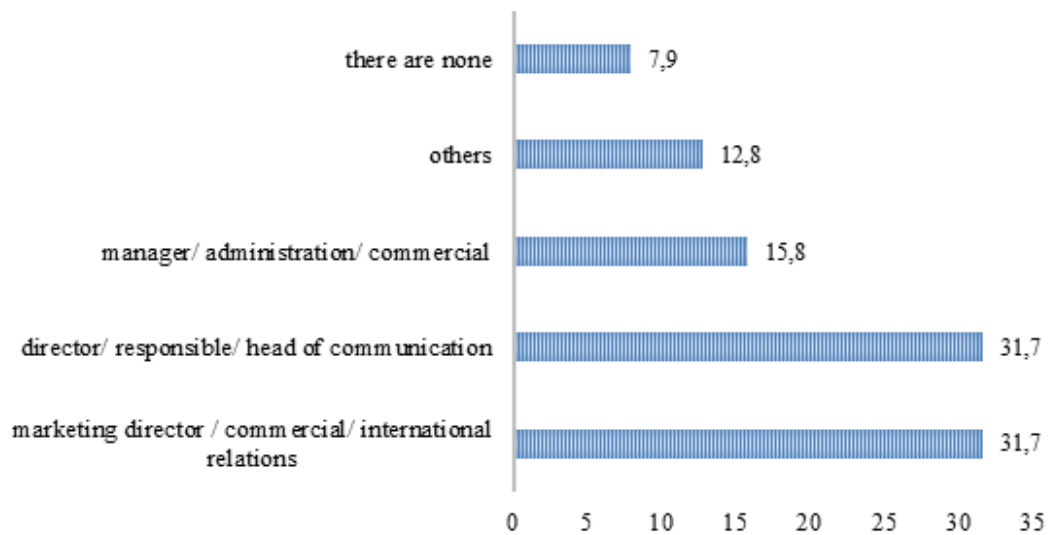
Regarding the existence of a communication department in Galicia's business structure, different scenarios were found according to the size of the organization (number of employees). While a large company or institution has a specific communication department (55%), medium-sized organizations have a department that brings together several functions, including that of communication (38%). Most micro or small entities, on the other hand, stated that they did not carry out communication actions (31.8%) or that they subcontracted these services (9%).

The degree in Journalism continues to be the dominant training of communication officers in Galicia. It follows, however, the profile of Economic Sciences, Business Sciences, Administration and Business Management. Thus, after Journalism, the most

important areas are Advertising and Public Relations, followed by Audiovisual Communication. Marketing/Commerce training also has an important presence among the leaders of the communication departments.

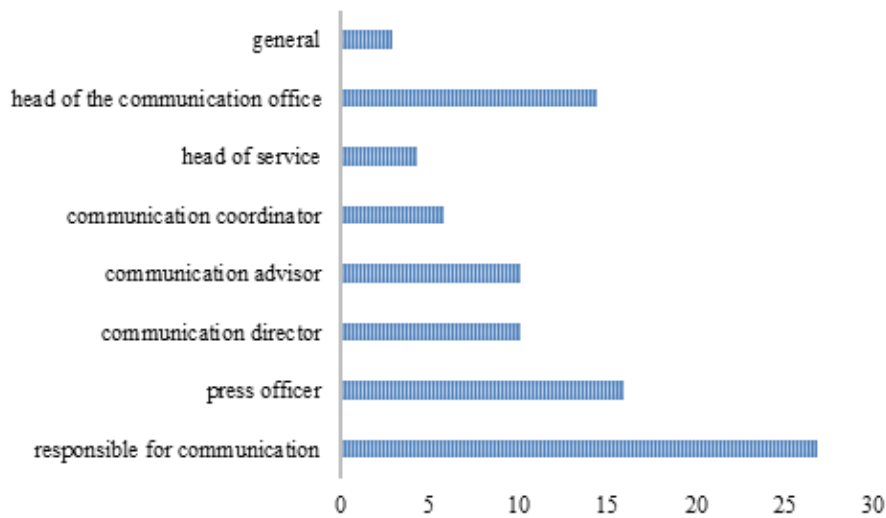
The communication departments of Galician organizations tend to be composed of one or two people (more are rare) and the feminization of the profession is evident in the multiple forms of configuration of the work teams.

In both large and small and medium-sized companies, the names of those responsible for communication are multiple and have been regrouped (Graph 1). However, a trend was detected: the formula “communication director” coexists as a mixed management figure, which combines, in its name, the terms marketing/commercial/international relations.



Graphic 1: Names of the person responsible for communication in companies

In institutions, “responsible for communication” is the predominant denomination, followed by “press officer” and “head of the communication office”. “Press officer” continues to be one of the most frequent titles in the designation of the heads of the communication department of Galician institutions (Graph 2).



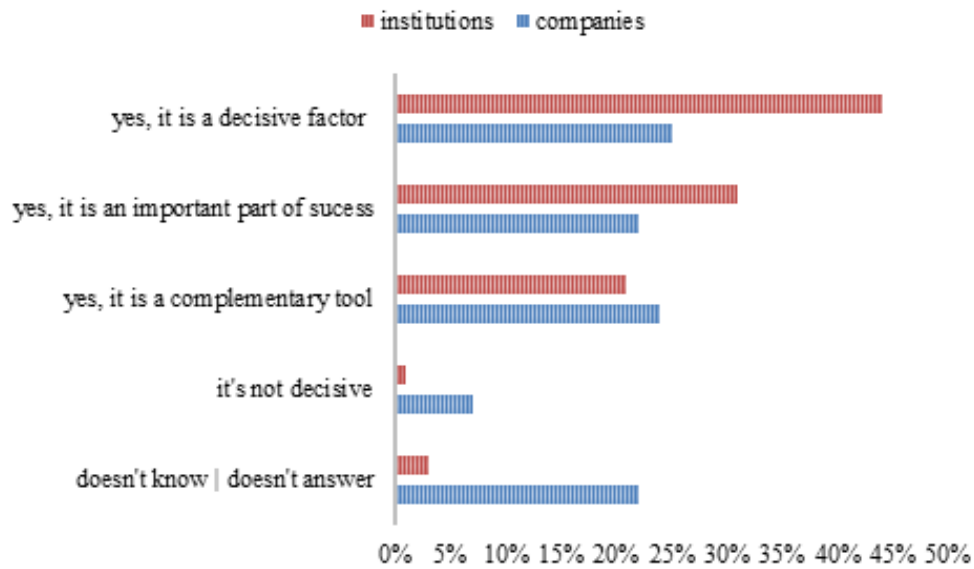
Graphic 2: Denominations for the responsible for communication in institutions

### PERCEIVED IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

The growing relevance of communication in the last five years is, for both companies and institutions, a consensual aspect (Graph 3).

About 96% of the institutions' communication officers consider that communication is important for the success of the organization's management, either because they consider it a decisive factor (44%), an important part of success (31%) or a complementary tool (21%). This percentage reduces to 71% in the case of companies, as 25% of their communication leaders consider communication to be a decisive tool, 22% say it is a fundamental part of success, but for 24% it is a complementary tool.

These data are consistent with those obtained in other studies (Baamonde et al., 2016; Dircom, 2015). As can be seen in Graph 3, in companies, the different positive notions of the communication function coexist in similar percentages, which suggests that the bet on communication is not yet strategic, as it is not considered decisive to achieve organizational objectives.



Graphic 3: Level of importance of communication for institutions and companies

### DEGREE OF COMMUNICATION PLANNING

Despite the global importance attributed to communication, only 24% of institutions and 18% of companies had a communication plan formally written and linked to the organizational strategy. In a slightly higher percentage of cases (35% of institutions and 28% of companies), the plan would be under development and some organizations (16% and 15%, respectively), were considering its preparation.

The data draws attention to the low percentage of companies and institutions that plan communication, regardless of their size. This means that, also in large companies and institutions, work is being carried out without communication planning that contributes to the achievement of the strategic objectives of these organizations.

Considering the country's data, these numbers are lower than those of medium and large companies, in which 51% of organizations claim to have a communication plan (Dircom, 2015).

In the case of communication plans for crisis situations, the percentages are clearly lower, with only 8% of companies and institutions having a defined crisis plan (in writing), which shows absolute unpredictability in view of possible risks (Table 2).

	COMMUNICATION PLAN LINKED TO THE ORGANIZACIONAL STRATEGY		PLAN OF CRISIS	
	Companies	Institutions	Companies	Institutions
Yes, formally written	17,7%	24%	7,6%	8%
Not written yet, but in development	28,5%	35%	15,3%	20%
Not yet, but it is being considered	15,4%	16%	9,2%	18%
Doesn't exist	33,8%	18%	60,7%	45%
Doesn't know / doesn't answer	4,6%	7%	7,1%	9%

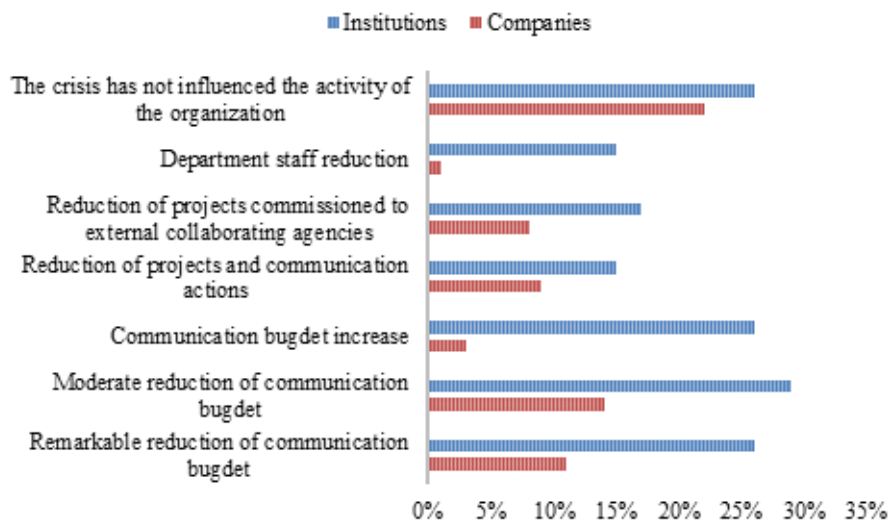
Table 2: Communication planning in companies and institutions

### EFFECTS OF THE CRISIS

When analyzing the direct consequences of the economic crisis on the communicative activity of organizations (Graph 4), it was found that about 26% of the institutions' communication officers and 22% of companies believe that the crisis did not influence their communicative activity.

However, in the case of institutions, 55% of respondents point to a moderate or notable reduction in the communication budget (compared to 26% who speak of an increase). Even so, the decrease in communication projects and actions, in the projects entrusted to the agencies, as well as the reduction in the personnel of the communication department, occurs in less than 20% of the cases.

The results obtained show that the companies felt less consequences from the economic crises, although the most notable difference seems to be in the reduction of the personnel of the communication department, only pointed out by 1% of the companies' communication officers. The moderate reduction in the communication budget seems to be the main negative consequence that the business communication sector suffered in Galicia, as a result of the crisis.



Graphic 4: Effects of the crisis for companies and institutions

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Communication management is an important function for all types of companies and institutions, regardless of their size or location. It is through communication that organizations establish relationships with their internal and external publics and, therefore, this becomes a strategic issue for the present and for the future of all companies and institutions.

However, even though all the professionals surveyed in this study attributed it importance, significant differences were found in the assessment, understanding and execution of the strategic function of communication.

First, and starting with the common points, the name of the maximum communication officer in Galician entities is multiple and diverse, which indicates that the terminology “communication director” has not yet entered the organizational fabric and may mean the absence management value in positions associated with communication in organizations. “Communication officer” is the most common option for companies and institutions.

In companies, communication is closely linked to marketing, both in the name of the department and in the name of its responsible. However, in the institutional field, the terminological variety has not left behind the “press officer” label, which prioritizes and at the same time expressly limits the activities of the communication department leader to relations with the media.

Second, with regard to the existence of the communication department, the reality is diverse, depending on the size of the organization and that of its sector of activity. However, there is still a need to reinforce the importance of communication as a specialized function, with effective weight in making organizational decisions. In regard to small and medium-sized companies, since they occupy a good part of the business structure in Galicia, it was expected that there would be an approximation between training centers,

professionals and organizations from different sectors to raise awareness about the role that the communication specialist can occupy in the service of business strategy.

Thirdly, it was noticed that both companies and institutions favor external communication. Companies are more concerned with relations with the consumer, with suppliers and with other companies (commercial sphere), while institutions favor relations with journalists (impact on the media).

Fourthly, attention is drawn to the low degree of strategic awareness of communication, detected in both types of organization. The percentages of strategic communication planning and crisis communication are very low, especially in companies. In the understanding of strategic communication as an indispensable factor for success, the institutional sector is more advanced than the business sector.

In the case of Galicia, this investigation showed that institutional communication is more developed at the strategic level than that of companies. The explanation can be found in the proximity between the areas of institutional communication and political communication, in Spain, where the majority of institutional communication positions depend on the political mandate, which clearly links the political strategy to the institutional one (García-Orosa & Vázquez-Sande, 2012; Rodríguez Virgili, 2015). Thus, it is recommended that future studies address the following questions: does political communication promote the strategic development of institutional communication? Are relations with the media still the main concern of institutional communication?

But, on the other hand, this form of return on investment, tested in the political sphere, is foreign to the dynamics of business communication, where it seems that it is in commerce that Galician companies appreciate the importance of communication and, therefore, in the service sector, where the degree of strategic development of communication is greatest.

Finally, regarding the impact of the economic crisis, a more negative perception was expected. "The crisis did not influence the organization's activity" was a common response in companies and institutions. The negative impact, however, seems to be more pronounced at the institutional level. Such an aspect may be due to the citizen demand that falls on the public sector, in a situation of cuts and economic difficulties, where the image of public entities is more evident, since of these public accountability is expected, according to a transparent management of resources that belong to everyone.

Translation: Carmen Costa-Sánchez, José Miguel Tüñez-López, María Isabel Míguez-González

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## **COMMUNICATION AND CRISIS MANAGEMENT IN GALICIAN COMPANIES: STUDY OF ITS EVOLUTION IN THE LAST TWO YEARS**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This study analysed the communicative approach followed by Galician companies classified as “highly polluting” in crisis situations. Taking as a starting point the Registro Estatal de Emisiones y Fuentes Contaminantes, dependent of the Ministerio de la Transición Ecológica (PRTR Spain), the universe under study has been established and the communicative activity of the 87 companies based in Galicia with the highest polluting emissions index (sum of waste and emissions, data referring to 2016) has been analysed through in-depth interviews. The results are compared with those obtained two years ago, in the first phase of the study, when information was collected from 120 companies (data from 2014). The purpose of the study is to carry out an analysis of crisis management of this companies and thus be able to assess the communication activity in this sector, as well as its evolution in recent years (2014-2016).

### **KEYWORDS**

communication; crisis; pollution; management; public relations; Dircom

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## **COMUNICAÇÃO E GESTÃO DE CRISES EM EMPRESAS GALEGAS: ESTUDO DA SUA EVOLUÇÃO NOS ÚLTIMOS DOIS ANOS**

### **RESUMO**

Este é um estudo no qual se explora a abordagem de comunicação de crise utilizada pelas empresas galegas classificadas como “altamente poluentes”. Tendo como ponto de partida o Registro Estatal de Emisiones y Fuentes Contaminantes do Ministerio de la Transición Ecológica (PRTR Espanha), foi estabelecido o universo de estudo e analisou-se a atividade comunicativa das 87 empresas sediadas na Galiza, que possuem o maior índice de emissões poluentes (soma de resíduos e emissões do ano de 2016), através da realização de entrevistas em profundidade. Os resultados foram comparados com aqueles que foram obtidos no ano de 2014, na primeira fase do estudo, que incluiu a recolha de informações de 120 empresas. O objetivo deste trabalho foi realizar uma análise da gestão de crise destas empresas e, assim, avaliar a atividade comunicativa do setor, bem como a sua evolução nos últimos anos (2014-2016).

**PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

comunicação; crise; poluição; gestão; relações públicas; Dircom

**INTRODUCTION**

This is a study analyses crisis communication strategies of “highly polluting” Galician companies. The purpose of the study is to carry out an analysis of communication management in order to assess the activity in the sector, as well as to compare it with the results obtained four years ago regarding the first phase of this study.

The starting point of this study was the Registro Estatal de Emisiones y Fuentes Contaminantes (PRTR Spain)<sup>1</sup>, which was used to establish the universe under study. It is a new research based on the premise that highly polluting companies are more likely to undergo a crisis which might affect both their communication and reputation. In this sense, this research analyses current mechanisms they use to deal with such situations.

**THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The study hypothesises that companies which take bigger environmental risks are more susceptible to preventive actions that include crisis communication plans. According to this notion, companies and institutions with a higher number of toxic releases (including to air, water and soil) should be better prepared to manage and communicate during a potential crisis, which should include prompt implementation of plans.

Every company, either public or private, is susceptible to suffering crises that affect their communicative action (González Herrero, 1998), which imply the loss of trust from its stakeholders or damages to its reputation. There are multiple scenarios a company may be confronted with which may result in a communication problem. This includes financial, human resources related problems or work accidents, which can potentially harm the company’s reputation and, as so, prevention is believed to play an essential role in many cases. Having communication mechanisms that allow to suppress and alleviate the problem may be vital to ensure the company’s survival.

The department in charge of managing communication should create a specific kind of document, called “crisis plan”, in order to address any potential threats to the company in a serene and calm way. The crisis plan will make it easier to know what to do depending on the situation, thus ensuring the organization’s survival. The absence of such a plan reveals lack of preparation and potential risks such as:

1. a delay in both the planning and application of emergency procedures;
2. a certain confusion and lack of coordination caused by an inexistent plan will stir up distrust, often motivated by the company’s silence on the matter (Ongallo, 2000); the organization should never forget that information is the basis for all decisions, which means that companies must be granted access to all the available information before making a decision (Harrison, 2002).

<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.prtr-es.es>

In short, the plan's main purpose is to be the key element in crisis communication strategies: it is the first element of a continuity plan that deals with whatever may affect the services rendered by the company, which also facilitates decision making regarding the future (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestal, 2016).

In view of this situation, it is only logical to think that companies are more likely to have work-related accidents, whose consequences might increase the risk and actually endanger their own survival, as highly polluting ones, should have this kind of documents as to be ready to act without losing any time and ensure full efficacy and efficiency in order to survive and restore their reputation.

### **GALICIAN COMPANIES AND COMMUNICATION FRAMEWORKS**

To understand the purpose of the study it is necessary to think about business organizations and their internal and external frameworks regarding communication, but also about their plans to prevent public relations crises. This study focuses essentially on two theoretical frameworks: the communication structure of the study's object and its view on preventing and managing communication during a crisis.

By analysing the communication framework of Galician companies, it was found that there is little literature about it. Besides specific studies about health institutions (Costa-Sánchez, 2012), Galician municipalities or small and medium-sized companies (Fernández-Souto & Puentes-Rivera, 2014), and except for the first stage of the current study published in 2016 (Fernández-Souto et al., 2016), there are no references to in-depth studies.

There are a lot more researches about communication frameworks and Dircom in Spain (Alloza, García-Perrote & Panadero, 2007; Armendáriz, 2015; Benavides, 1993; Casado Molina, Méndiz Noguero & Peláez Sanchez., 2013; Costa, 2001, 2009, 2011; Dircom, 2010, 2013, 2015a; Dircom Catalunya, 2013; Farias, Paniagua & Roses, 2010; Freixa, 2004; García Santamaría, 2011; González Molina, 2011; Gutiérrez García & Rodríguez Virgili, 2015; Matilla, 2010, 2015; Matilla & Marca, 2011; Míguez & Baamonde, 2011; Morales & Enrique, 2007; Moreno, Zerfass & Navarro, 2010; Sáez, Matilla & Cuenca, 2015). Based on all these researches, one may conclude that the two options which matter the most to companies' communication strategies result from two types of frameworks: an internal one, similar to a department integrated in their own organogram, or an external support-like organization, which is occasionally or permanently subcontracted.

With regard to the significance granted by companies to the creation of their own internal communications department, we have recovered the data collected by Fernández-Souto and Puentes-Rivera (2014), between 1993 and 2009, according to which few Galician business organizations had a specialized department dedicated to communication, almost none had experts in the matter. Less than half of the medium-sized companies analysed admitted having developed communication actions. By 2010 there was very little progress and only 18% of the analysed SMC's had an integrated department – or, at least, someone in charge of communications management –, whose staff, for

the most part (90%), did not have the necessary specialized training in communication and/or public relations and presented a low level of professionalism (Fernández-Souto & Puentes-Rivera, 2014)

This trend is in consonance with the national reality since, and according to Dueñas (2016), the management of small and medium-sized companies (which are over 98% of the Spanish corporate fabric) is underdeveloped and presents a low level of investment in resources regarding Communication. In the same line of thought, Gómez (2011), mentions that communication “makes small and medium-sized companies scared” (p. 120), because they see it as an activity for big organizations and multinational companies. Dueñas (2016) goes on, by stating that organizational communication is mostly reduced to establishing relationships with clients and that its management is done without any previous planning, sometimes consisting of some kind of isolated marketing campaign: mainly flyers, catalogues or advertisements in the media, client-oriented promotions or direct contact through sales. The interpretation of communication in medium-sized companies is treated merely as a product, leaving out their internal target publics and, mainly, other external target publics which are not on the clients list. There is no evidence of investment in the management and prevention of crises from this kind of businesses, on the contrary they seem to resort to outside professionals whenever there is a problem and they do not seem able to deal with it.

In this context, the activity of communication and public relations agencies stands out, due to the crisis communication services they provide. According to Empresite, there are more than 600 companies in Spain that provide crisis communication services, mostly consulting and communication companies, advertising and/or public relations agencies<sup>2</sup>. Most of them are located in Madrid (5.536) and Barcelona (1.807). In addition to these data, there is the list published by Top Comunicación<sup>3</sup>, which has chosen 20 major agencies that operate in crisis communication.

When comparing these data nationwide, the Galician case is by far more limited. According to Empresite, there are 637 communication and public relations companies in the four Galician provinces, information that does not coincide with that on the guide published by Xunta de Galicia<sup>4</sup>, where 274 companies are catalogued as advertising, communication and public relations agencies. There is no specification of the rendered services, so information about the exact number of Galician agencies that provide crisis management services cannot be provided.

In any case, the reality of public relations agencies is changing and variable, therefore – as is mentioned in the methodology section – we will limit the universe under

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://empresite.eleconomista.es/Actividad/COMUNICACION-DE-CRISIS/>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.topcomunicacion.com/agencias-especializadas-en-comunicacion-de-crisis-guia-de-la-comunicacion/>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from [https://www.xunta.gal/guia-da-comunicacion?p\\_p\\_id=1\\_WAR\\_guiacomunicacionportlet&p\\_p\\_lifecycle=o&p\\_p\\_state=normal&p\\_p\\_mode=view&p\\_p\\_col\\_id=column-2&p\\_p\\_col\\_count=1&\\_1\\_WAR\\_guiacomunicacionportlet\\_\\_spage=%2Fportlet\\_action%2Fguiacomunicacion\\_portlet%2Farbol%3FidOrganismo%3D466&\\_1\\_WAR\\_guiacomunicacionportlet\\_idOrganismo=466](https://www.xunta.gal/guia-da-comunicacion?p_p_id=1_WAR_guiacomunicacionportlet&p_p_lifecycle=o&p_p_state=normal&p_p_mode=view&p_p_col_id=column-2&p_p_col_count=1&_1_WAR_guiacomunicacionportlet__spage=%2Fportlet_action%2Fguiacomunicacion_portlet%2Farbol%3FidOrganismo%3D466&_1_WAR_guiacomunicacionportlet_idOrganismo=466)



study to communication agencies that provide crisis management services to major companies listed in the 2018 public relations report, drafted by Torres y Carreras agency<sup>5</sup>.

### CRISIS COMMUNICATION MANAGEMENT

Another aspect being addressed in this study is the crisis communication management. According to Losada (2016):

crisis and communication are so intimately connected that one might doubt the nature of the event if it passes discretely and quietly by the ones affected by it. In case explanations are not needed, if one can go by without justifying what happened, if there is no need to warn someone, to apologize, if the past goes undisturbed, why would someone keep on talking about it? Consequently, one should not exaggerate the role of the communicator in crises, nor how important it is for that person to be conveniently prepared to perform their task. (pp. 12-13)

Every company is likely to suffer in a crisis situation, even if not similarly (Rodríguez Perea, 2016). Also, not every organization is able to handle prevention and communication of a crisis while trying to minimize its consequences as to keep and/or recover a certain reputation amongst their different target publics.

In support of what Ruiz Mora (2015) said, determining how to act in critical situations and what steps to take about communication in the course of the crisis will make it easier to end it with smaller negative impacts for the company, even though this does not mean there will be zero consequences. Nevertheless, nowadays there are many companies that still do not think it is necessary to invest in these tasks and resort to specific services for managing the crisis when it is already unfolding and with serious negative social impact. At this point, it seems clear that it would be easier to manage and solve a crisis in an earlier stage and provided that there was a prevention plan.

If there is already a problem, gaining time is of essence, and therefore it becomes imperative that who ever is in charge of the company knows how and when to act. Having a previously drafted document, a crisis plan that structures and specifies the main intervention strategies, would be quite interesting. According to De Gasperín (2015), the crisis plan is a set of tools and institutional possibilities that allows the successful handling of this dangerous and complex phenomenon.

However, there are still a lot of companies that have not agreed to that yet and lack crisis communication plans that serve as an example of how to act, how to take responsibility towards the public, manage their presence in social media, monitor the effects of the crisis.

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<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from <https://historico.prnoticias.com/comunicacion/facturacion-del-sector-rrpp/20167834-ranking-agencias-comunicacion-mas-facturan>

## METHODOLOGY

The starting hypothesis maintains that the most concomitant Galician companies do not properly value crisis communication management, even if it is clear that many of them have, in recent years, invested greatly in decreasing their pollutant emissions and in minimizing the possibilities of a crisis.

As mentioned before, the data used was gathered from the Registro Estatal de Emisiones y Fuentes Contaminantes, which provides information on air, water and land pollutant emissions and waste transfer from major industries and other occasional and diffuse sources and allows a territory-based selection.

As far as this study is concerned, research was limited to the autonomous community of Galicia and the numbers of pollutant emissions and waste were added together on two different occasions: the first in September 2015, with data from 2014; and the second in September 2018, with data from 2016. The data related to 2017 were published in February 2019, and that was the reason why they could not be used while carrying out this work field.

The research contemplated the following variables: the total number of registrations in the autonomous community of Galicia, 2014 and 2016; economic activity CNAE<sup>6</sup>-2009; multiple selection activity; data concerning emissions and waste. Therefore, 120 companies were analysed in 2014, and 87 in 2016. It should be noted that, while analysing all the data concerning emissions and waste, researchers noticed that a few companies were mentioned in both lists, which reduces their total. On the other hand, it should also be noted that, the fact that since the official publication of the PRTR data until the drafting of this study some of the companies on the official list have become inactive<sup>7</sup>.

Once the object of study and its spatial-temporal dimension was defined, the methodology used to collect the data was specified. First, there were some in-depth interviews carried out among the people in charge of communication at the mentioned companies – as long as there were some – as well as an analysis of articles in the media about previous and/or current crises, the way they were addressed and how information was managed. The purpose of this stage of the research was to gather data on the communication internal frameworks of the companies under study and to compare them with the ones published in the media concerning past crises.

Interviews were carried out with professionals specialized in crisis management in order to collect data that allowed to compare it with that provided by the companies, mostly experts in crisis communication prevention and management at the major communication and public relations agencies located in Spain. The study universe was limited to communication agencies which provide crisis management services to major companies also listed in the 2018 public relations report, drafted by Torres y Carreras, and based on the billing data<sup>8</sup>.

<sup>6</sup> National Classification of Economic Activities.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.prtr-es.es/informes/facilitylevel.aspx>

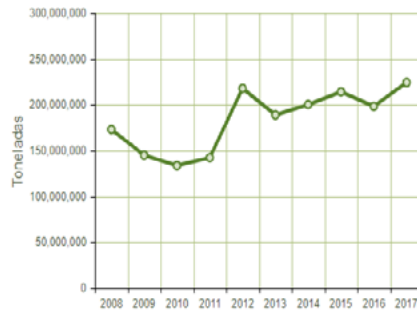
<sup>8</sup> See <https://prnoticias.com/comunicacion/facturacion-del-sector-rrpp/20167834-ranking-agencias-comunicacion-mas-facturan>

Finally, a graphic explanation of the results was made as to clarify the conclusions of the study, as well as to confirm or not the starting hypothesis: the most polluting companies in Galicia keep dismissing the importance of crisis communication management; however, many of them have been making major investments to reduce their pollutant emissions and to manage the minimization of potential problems. Nevertheless, almost none of the companies have a crisis plan or specific mechanisms to deal with it.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This is the analysis of the main results of this study.

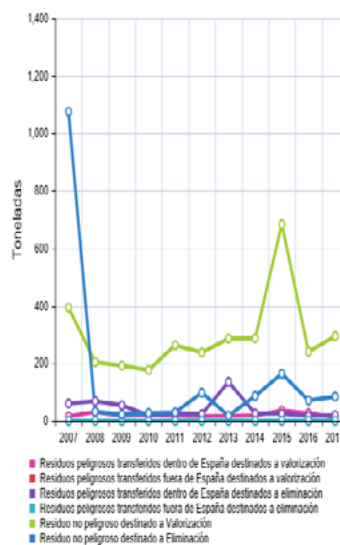
First, a problem concerning waste management was detected in the autonomous community of Galicia. As presented in Graph 1, emissions in Galicia have increased.



Graph 1: Time series of emissions in Galicia

Source: <http://www.prtr-es.es/informes/seriespollutant.aspx>

The approach is slightly different when it comes to data on waste. Graph 2 shows a more moderate increasing trend, but with a significant recovery in 2015. Anyway, waste data are also alarming.



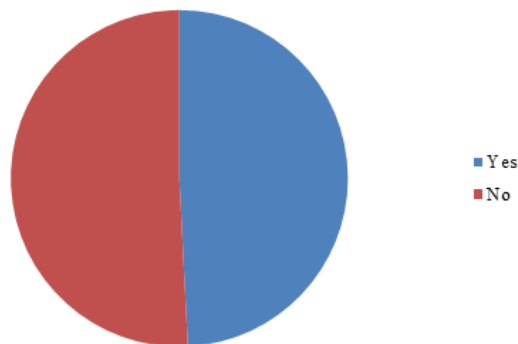
Graph 2: Time series of waste in Galicia

Source: <http://www.prtr-es.es/informes/serieswaste.aspx>

According to this data, it would be only logical to think that the larger the number of tons of emissions and waste, the more interested polluting companies would be in protecting themselves and in getting prepared to deal with adverse situations. Nevertheless, this line of thought appears to contradict the data provided by the companies themselves.

In the first stage of the study, and according to the statements of people in charge of communication, the trend of the theme under study is improvisation. Although the analysis focused on highly polluting sectors, it was perceived that – to a large extent – the people in charge did not have previous plans to manage communication in times of crisis. Right then, communication directors from the analysed companies confirmed that only 15,8% of the organizations had successfully dealt with some sort of crisis in the past (Fernández-Souto et al., 2016); in the following stage, the percentage decreased dramatically and none of the interviewees admitted to have suffered any kind of reputational crisis. However, references in social media corroborated the fact that there were some repercussions in some of the companies studied, even though none of them had anything to do with waste or pollution management.

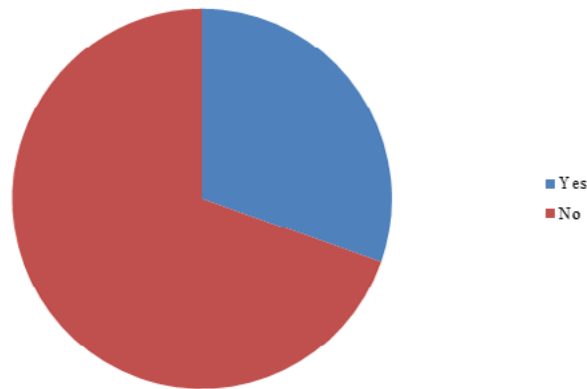
The next aspect being analysed in this study is the internal frameworks related to communication management and, thus, the implementation of crisis plans. According to collected data regarding 2014, there was a balance between the organizations which had a communication department and those who did not (Graph 3).



Graph 3: The existence of communication departments at the companies analysed in 2014

Source: Fernández-Souto et al., 2016, p. 54

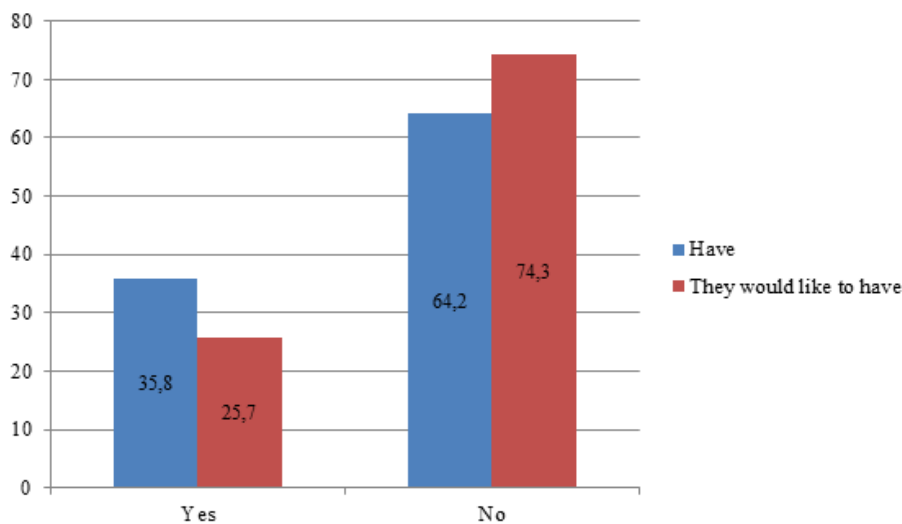
In the light of this data, the researchers expected to find some improvement over time and an increase of the number of communication departments in 2016, but, instead of progress there was regression, since the number of departments decreased (Graph 4).



Graph 4: The existence of internal frameworks of communication at the companies analysed in 2016

The following element of analysis refers to the existence of crisis plans. Communication directors were asked if they had a written crisis plan. The interviewer insisted strongly that the model ought to be “written” because most analysed companies mentioned that both the company’s director and the communication director knew what to do, but there was nothing in writing and, thus, nothing was shared with other members of the department or senior management.

It was established that in 2014 only 35,8% of the analysed companies had a communication plan in writing (Graph 5).

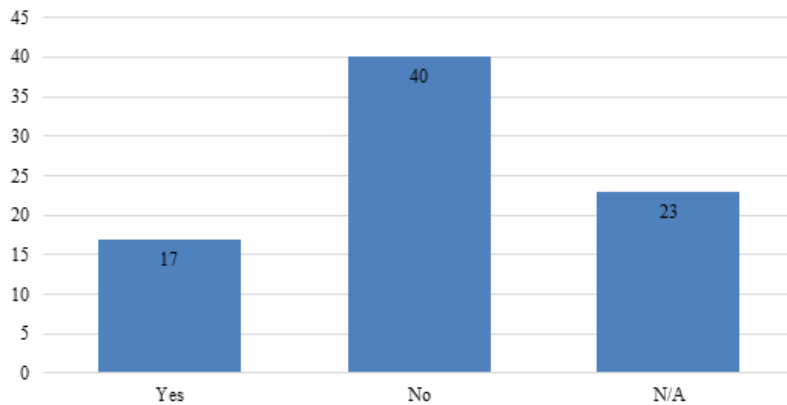


Graph 5: The existence of crisis communication plans at highly polluting Galician companies in 2014

Source: Fernández-Souto et al., 2016, p. 55

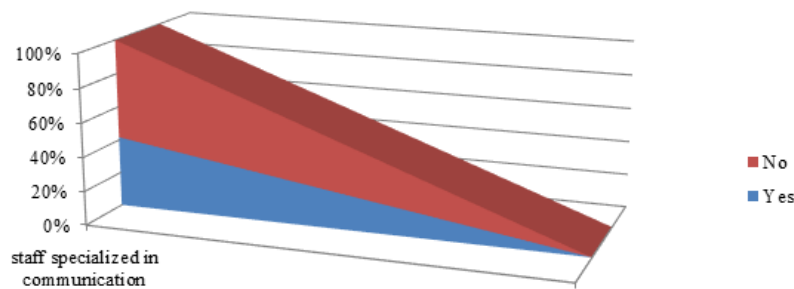
Given this information, the second stage of the study did not show any progress since most organizations still did not have specific plans (Graph 6). However, the last data include a large number of “does not answer/does not know” answers, which sounds quite alarming given the specific role a crisis plan should play in these organizations. At

the same time, it seems to be consistent with the collected data on specific communication frameworks: if it confirms companies analysed in 2016 have less departments specifically dedicated to communication, it seems logical that the level of professionalization, and therefore of the activities related to communication and management of reputation, should be lower. Not having professionals capable of making progress regarding communication highlights their lack of knowledge about the procedures.



Graph 6: The existence of communication crisis plans at highly polluting Galician companies in 2016

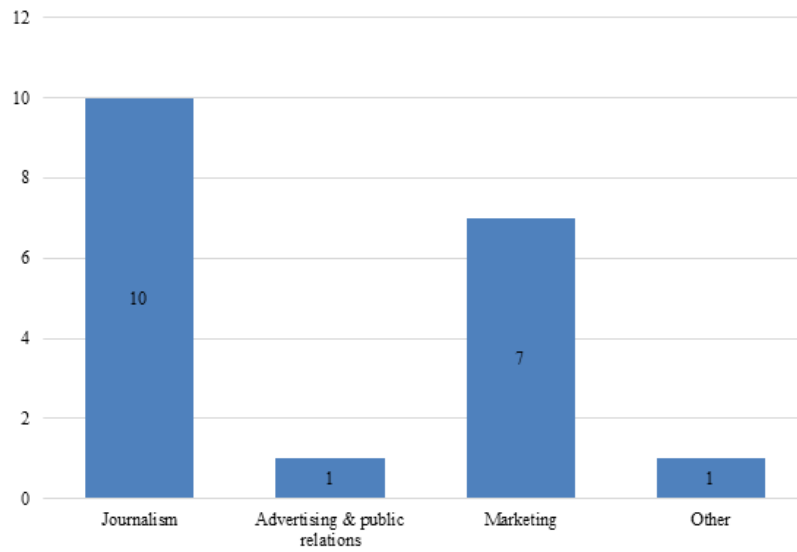
The study also analyses the data concerning the training of communication managers who deal with crisis situations. According to 2014 data, there is a certain balance among the professionals who have been specifically trained in communication (41,7%) and those from other areas of expertise (Graph 7).



Graph 7: Academic background of communication managers at companies analysed in 2016

Source: Fernández-Souto et al., 2016, p. 55

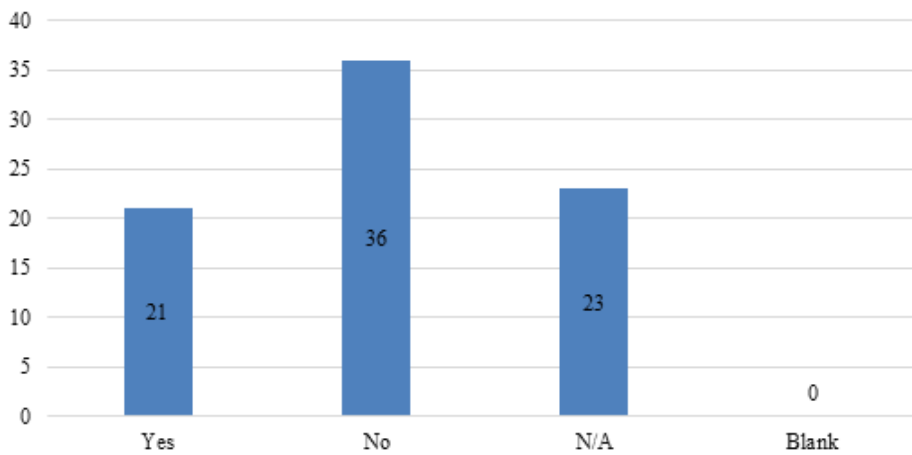
Nevertheless, the 2016 data seem to indicate that communication managers at these companies are more qualified and that the majority of them have even got people who specialized in communication at college (Graph 8).



Graph 8: Academic background of communication managers at companies analysed in 2016

In any case, the predominance of journalists and marketing professionals as head of the departments, both in 2014 and 2016, should be stressed. According to the analysed data, we could say that the mentioned companies tend not to have so many communication frameworks, but those who have them resort to professionals. This tendency is mainly present in the big companies located in this autonomous community when comparing with SMC's, mostly in the livestock business, where there are almost no management frameworks or directors who see communication as an investment, but rather as an expense.

In addition to this data, during the second phase of the study there was another variable added to the research, and the communication managers were asked if they outsourced or not communication services (Graph 9).



Graph 9: Outsourcing of external communication services at the studied companies, 2016

Once again, the data show how little concern companies have for communication activities: most of the studied companies choose not to outsource communication services and have internal frameworks that take up these tasks; this comes to show communication still plays an irrelevant part in the strategic planning of the analysed organizations.

To complement this data, 10 major communication agencies located in Spain were contacted (following the 2018 public relations report drafted by Torres y Carreras, according to billing data) and were asked about the services provided for managing crises and if they operated with the studied companies. From the 10 agencies contacted, only five collaborated with the study. It is, nonetheless, a representative sample since they all provide crisis management related services (in the case of Llorente y Cuenta that section represents 30% of the company's total invoicing; as far as Tinkle is concerned it represents between 5% and 10%), and three out of five collaborate with highly polluting companies located in Galicia, even though, due to confidentiality agreements signed with the clients, they are not at liberty to divulge any further data.

## CONCLUSION

As already stated by Sánchez Calero (2004), a crisis is one of the most genuine phenomena in corporate communication management for two main reasons: first, and regardless of its nature, it affects the whole organization; the second reason has to do with the idea of communication management and its priorities, one of which, due to the level of transcendence it may reach, ought to be foreseen. However, it seems Galician entrepreneurs do not share this notion because crisis management in Galicia is still at an early stage. This conclusion was reached at the first phase of the study, but the second one shows some continuity when it comes to data, whose main conclusions are summarized:

1. although the number of polluting emissions and waste has been increasing every year in Galicia, polluting companies do not invest on communication; they do not create inner structures that can deal with it, nor do they see the need to subcontract outside services. The Galician polluting companies gathered in PRTR 2016 have less communication departments than in 2014. In view of such information, it should be mentioned that there is a high percentage of organizations that do not show any interest in hiring specialized services and, even worse, many of them know nothing whatsoever about this reality or if they should "request" communication and public relation actions or tools;
2. the lack of crisis plans is also related to this issue. In 2014 only 35 of the inquired companies confirmed having a written plan, but by 2016 the number had dropped to 17;
3. the professionalization of the staff who manages communication is still in the hands of experts in marketing or communication sciences, mostly journalists. However, it was also observed a tendency to decrease the number of professionals graduated in areas outside communication. Also, the number of graduates in other areas of Communication Sciences, like advertising and public relations, or audio-visual media has increased;
4. this data must be analysed based on the thought that the majority of the organizations interviewed are medium-sized companies known to interpret communication as a cost instead of an investment. The interviews carried out show that the companies which have communication departments, with specialized professionals, and which invest in crisis communication management, are



those that have developed into multinationals (Endesa, Repsol, Ence, etc.), contrary to small and medium size companies – especially in the livestock business – which totally lacks investment in that area;

5. finally, it was observed that a few of these companies resort to renowned outside experts, by hiring services from public relation and communication agencies which operate at a national and international level.

Every organization communicates, even if not voluntarily. When companies were exclusively dedicated to producing, communication was believed to be an accessory tool. But nowadays it is a strategic and key differentiation factor and, above all, the means to reach a concrete position and build up a certain reputation among its different publics.

Organizations should base their relationship with their stakeholders on trust and transparency, by honouring their commitments. This need is even clearer when it comes to highly polluting companies whose social responsibility is always more evident. Regarding the cases studied, however, it seems they still have a long way to go.

Translation: Helena Antunes

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## **WHEN THE SENDER IS THE MESSAGE: THE COMMUNICATION OF MARCELO REBELO DE SOUSA ABOUT THE 2017 FIRES**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The theme of this article is the official crisis communication of the Portuguese Presidency (Presidência da República Portuguesa – PRP) during the forest fires that occurred in June and in October 2017, respectively known as the “tragedy of Pedrógão Grande” and the “October fires”. The fires of 2017 were the most harmful in Portuguese history and received wide coverage in the international media. That year, Portugal was the country that most suffered with fires, according to an European Union report (2018), accounting for about 90% of deaths caused by this type of fire in the entire area covered by the report. The main theoretical basis of this study is situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) (Coombs, 2007). In SCCT, Coombs (2007) identified the variables involved in a crisis and presented the most appropriate response strategies to be applied to each crisis type. Through the discourse analysis method, we described and compared the Portuguese Presidency’s communication on the management of these two crises of similar origins (forest fires), only four months apart (June and October 2017). Our aim is to contribute to an understanding of the response strategies proposed by Coombs (2007) when applied to communication exclusively based on the public information model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). The research concluded that the PRP opted for the managing meaning strategy by adjusting information and predominance of the primary repair responses of the category “rebuild” and subcategory “compensation”, producing an appropriate response according to SCCT (Coombs, 2007). However, we note that the PRP crisis communication for the 2017 fires is a case in which the personal characteristics of the sender and the variables – crisis responsibility, crisis history and prior relationship reputation – were more relevant to the effectiveness of crisis communication than the messages themselves.

### **KEYWORDS**

crisis communication; public relations; press office; SCCT; Portugal fires

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## **QUANDO O EMISSOR É A MENSAGEM: A COMUNICAÇÃO DE MARCELO REBELO DE SOUSA NOS INCÊNDIOS DE 2017**

### **RESUMO**

Este artigo tem como tema a comunicação oficial de crise da Presidência da República Portuguesa (PRP) durante os incêndios florestais que aconteceram nos meses de junho e de outubro de 2017, conhecidos, respetivamente, como “tragédia de Pedrógão Grande” e “incêndios de outubro”. Os incêndios de 2017 foram os mais nefastos da história de Portugal e receberam

uma grande cobertura dos média internacionais. Naquele ano, Portugal foi o país que mais sofreu com os fogos, de acordo com o relatório da União Europeia (2018), tendo sido responsável por, aproximadamente, 90% das mortes causadas por incêndios. O principal fundamento teórico do estudo é a teoria situacional de comunicação de crise (TSCC) (Coombs, 2007). Na TSCC, Coombs (2007) identificou as variáveis envolvidas numa crise e apresentou as estratégias de resposta mais adequadas a serem aplicadas a cada tipo de crise. Por meio do método da análise do discurso, descrevemos e comparamos a comunicação da Presidência da República Portuguesa na gestão dessas duas crises de origens semelhantes (incêndios florestais) separadas por apenas quatro meses (junho e outubro de 2017). A nossa intenção é contribuir para a compreensão das estratégias de resposta propostas por Coombs (2007) quando aplicadas a uma comunicação exclusivamente baseada no modelo de informação pública (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). A investigação concluiu que a PRP optou pela estratégia de gestão do significado (Coombs, 2015) com informações de ajuste e predominância das respostas reparativas primárias da categoria “reconstrução” e subcategoria “compensação”, produzindo a resposta adequada segundo a TSCC (Coombs, 2007). No entanto, observamos que a comunicação de crise da PRP para os incêndios de 2017 é um caso em que as características pessoais do emissor e as variáveis – responsabilidade pela crise, histórico da crise e reputação relacional anterior – foram mais relevantes para a comunicação de crise do que as mensagens propriamente ditas.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunicação de crise; relações públicas; assessoria de imprensa; TSCC; incêndios em Portugal

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## INTRODUCTION

More than 100 people have died in fires in Portugal in less than four months. As much as the coldness of these times, full of numbers and political, economic and financial buzzwords, invite us to downplay or trivialize, these more than 100 dead will never leave my mind, as a huge burden on my conscience as well as on my presidential term. (Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, President of the Portuguese Republic, October 17, 2017)<sup>1</sup>

In 2017, the world was surprised by the extent of the fires and the number of casualties never before recorded in the history of Portugal: by October 31, the fire had burned down over 442.000 hectares and killed 115 people. Thus, the fires in Portugal were considered one of the five largest natural disasters of the year (European Union, 2018). The excerpt from the pronouncement of the President of the Portuguese Republic, Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, delivered on October 17, 2017 directly from Oliveira do Hospital, a county where the fires caused 12 deaths (Incêndios: Oliveira do Hospital homenageia vítimas mortais com memorial “15 de outubro”, 2017), expresses the seriousness of the tragedy that had struck the country and the emotion-laden manner in which the President conducted his response to the 2017 fires.

That year, Rebelo de Sousa organized his agenda to be close to the victims of those tragedies and conducted his political action with affection (Lopes & Espírito Santo, 2019). Regarding the government, in his speech, the President was “relentless in his criticism”,

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136887>

exercising his presidential function of “pushing the government towards certain decisions” (Lopes & Espírito Santo, 2019, pp. 253-254).

Forests cover 67% of Portuguese territory and, in addition to their environmental significance, they are economically very important for the country. Instituto da Conservação da Natureza e das Florestas (ICNF, 2019) data attributed 1,2% of gross domestic product (GDP), 10% of exports and 92.000 direct jobs to the forestry sector. Therefore, the occurrence of large forest fires is a major risk to the sector and harmful to the entire Portuguese population, and not a problem isolated to the affected areas.

In 2017, by October 31, “there were 214 fires in this category that burned 412.781 hectares of forested area, about 93% of the total area burned” (ICNF, 2017, p. 8) in Portugal. Between January 1 and October 31 that year, 442.418 hectares burned, more than five times the average area recorded in the previous ten years (2007-2016), which was 83.780 hectares (ICNF, 2017). In comparison to the previous ten years, 2017 had the highest number of occurrences and the largest burned area.

The 2017 fires were the most tragic in Portugal’s history and saw wide coverage in the international media (Imprensa de todo o mundo com os olhos em Portugal devido aos incêndios, 2017). The most significant events took place in June, with the fires that began on the 17<sup>th</sup>, known as the “Pedrógão Grande tragedy”, and in October, with the fires that began on the 15<sup>th</sup>, called as the “October fires”.

	BURNED AREA (HA)	FATAL VICTIMS	PEOPLE INJURED	HOMES DESTROYED	COMPANIES DESTROYED
Pedrógão Grande	51.944	66	253	500	50
October fires	223.901	49	70	1.500	500

Table 1: Impact of the 2017 fires in Portugal

Source: Drawn up by the authors based on ICNF (2017) and “Incêndios de Outubro fizeram 49 mortos e atingiram 1.500 casas” (2018)

As seen in Table 1, the October fires destroyed 223.901 hectares, while the fires in June ones were responsible for the devastation of 51.944 hectares. While the Pedrógão Grande tragedy was smaller in area, it was more serious than the October fires in terms of the number of deaths and injuries: 66 fatal victims (*versus* 49) and 253 injured (*versus* 70). When it comes to assets, the October fires’ numbers were greater than Pedrógão Grande: 1.500 homes (*versus* 500) and 500 companies (*versus* 50) were ruined by the fire.

A European Union report published in 2018 about the previous year’s forest fires in Europe, the Middle East and North America highlighted the severity of Portugal’s fires. The report revealed that Portugal was the country that most suffered from fires that year, with 21.006 occurrences and 115 fatal victims, of a total of 127 across the area covered by the report. Portugal ranked second for burned area (540.630 hectares), behind the Russian Federation (1,4 million hectares).

The study presented in this article emerges from the research initiated by the first author (Toniolo, 2019) during her master’s degree in Strategic Communication at the University of Beira Interior with the guidance of the second author.

## THE PRESIDENT AND THE 2017 FIRES

The President of the Portuguese Republic in 2017 and, therefore, at the time the tragic fires took place, was Full Professor of law Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, whose term of office commenced on March 9, 2016. Rebelo de Sousa is affiliated with the Social Democratic Party (PSD) and is the fifth democratically elected president since the April 1974 Revolution. Politically, President Rebelo de Sousa positions himself as center-right (Bial, 2019).

Before joining politics, Rebelo de Sousa was a communicator and commentator for decades, as well as a professor. From his experience with media – initially in newspapers, then on the radio and finally on television – the President gained huge popularity that raised him to the condition of “the president of affections” (Sebastião, 2018) and “the president-celebrity” (Couto, 2019), a label that he claimed did not bother him (Bial, 2019). For the population, the President of the Portuguese Republic is just “Marcelo”, someone “from home” who is called by his first name (Couto, 2019).

Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is considered “a person of great intelligence, friendly, funny, emotional and a true political strategist” (Perfil: Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, o comentador que chegou a Belém, 2016, § 14). Since “bouncing through the glass” (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 8), the President has fed his popularity by meeting with Portuguese people, often under the eyes of the media (Lopes & Botelho, 2019). This is how Rebelo de Sousa has been nurturing his legitimacy to inspire optimism and positivity in a population that elected him when the country had just emerged from a severe economic crisis marked by the harsh impositions of austerity.

The unpredictability attributed to Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa is related to his aversion to protocol. As he himself is a journalist – in the “old fashioned” sense – “he dominates, like few others, the rhythms of journalistic production” (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 20) and the framing of television (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 23). The President uses his influence over the media to reach the population. He is skilled in influencing the public agenda and, hence, often dismisses scripts and favors improvisation: “Marcelo can always surprise, especially when there are journalists by his side and the time for news programs is approaching” (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 19).

It is not uncommon for him to speak directly to the press, he “uses the media as a kind of atrium of power, without the need for precise media advice” (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 13) and “pays special attention to the reporters who accompany him” (p. 14). He does not use digital social media because he understands he has no control over it (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 20).

Whether due to negligence in prevention, or inefficiency in firefighting efforts, the responsibility for the fires fell to the Portuguese state and its fundamental tasks. In this regard, in an interview with *Expresso* (Faria, 2017), President Rebelo de Sousa manifestly acknowledged the state’s responsibility for the tragedies, stating that “whenever citizens suffer serious damage because the state has not functioned as it should, it should compensate them, even if it is not possible to find a concrete entity responsible”.



## THE PRESIDENT IN THE FIELD

According to Lopes and Botelho (2019), it was past 9 p.m. when President Rebelo de Sousa hit the road, going against what the Republican National Guard (GNR) had advised him to do. When he arrived, he was received by the secretary of state for Internal Administration, Jorge Gomes, who, visibly moved, did not hold back tears before the press. “That emotional gesture would also contain the enormous fragility of a state that failed in its protection of the people”, highlight Lopes and Botelho (2019, p. 111). In just one day, the President went through nine counties, often driving his own car and, by choice, without the company of advisors.

However, when the strong fires came back on October 15 that same year, the President “didn’t immediately jump to the burning ground” (Lopes & Botelho, 2019, p. 70). He decided to cancel his agenda and wait for the prime minister, António Costa, to make a statement. With the recurrence of the tragedy, the press noticed a change in the President’s stance, observed by Lopes and Botelho (2019), which replaced affection with intervention. It was only on October 17, 2017, that he went to the region to “embrace the affected families and thank the firefighters for their work” (p. 71). That night, in Oliveira do Hospital, he delivered a tough speech directed at the government, demanding speed in forest reform and the implementation of effective firefighting measures.

The opinion poll known as the monthly barometer for *SIC/Expresso*, carried out by the Instituto Eurosondagem, showed the popularity of President Rebelo de Sousa throughout 2017<sup>2</sup>. Notwithstanding the tragedies of international repercussion that occurred that year as a result of the fires, the President was rated positively by at least 69% of the population (March 2017, reaching 72% in September 2017). In October 2017, the President obtained the lowest negative assessment rate in 12 months: 7,1% (reaching 10,3% in September 2017).

	MAY	JUNE	JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER	OCTOBER	NOVEMBER
<b>Positive</b>	69%	70%	70,7%	71%	72%	69,1%	70%
<b>Neutral</b>	14,4%	12,9%	12,4%	12,9%	11,7%	17,4%	15,8%
<b>Negative</b>	8,5%	9,4%	9,8%	9,5%	10,3%	7,1%	7,5%
<b>Not answered</b>	8,1%	7,7%	7,1%	6,6%	6,0%	6,4%	6,7%

Table 2: President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa’s popularity in 2017 (between May and November)

Source: Drawn up by the authors from Barómetro Eurosondagem for *SIC/Expresso*

## GOVERNMENTAL PUBLIC RELATIONS

By government communication, we mean “the information flows and relationship patterns involving the executive and society” (Duarte, 2011, p. 5). Canel (2018) argue that

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.eurosondagem.pt/inform/barometro%20orgaos%20poder.htm#PresidenteRepublica>

governmental communication can have both political and civic ends. To do so, it uses tools and strategies to influence its audiences, build reputation, interact and gain citizen support.

Regarding the public relations model (Grunig & Hunt, 1984) that governmental communication should follow, Canel (2010) argues that symmetric models are those able to obtain the best results. Despite being criticized for being utopian and idealizing the role of public relations in society, we agree that because of its democratic character and the search for a balance between public institutions and the public interest, the bidirectional symmetric model is the most appropriate for communication in public administration (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002). However, research conducted by Grunig and Jaatinen (1999) concluded that the model that predominates in the public sector is public information. “The public information model is a one-way model that emphasises the dissemination of accurate information to the general population, which seldom uses research and whose practitioners usually are journalists” (Grunig & Jaatinen, 1999, p. 219).

Valentini’s research (2013) confirmed that the public information model is the most common in the governmental sphere, but not the only one. Although all models can be identified, the press agent and bidirectional symmetric models were the ones that obtained the lowest frequencies in his study.

We know that public relations activity is associated with the management of communication between an organization and its publics, and that the duties of its professionals are to manage, plan and execute the communication of organizations (Grunig & Hunt, 1984). Public relations also have the social function to watch over the harmony between the discourse and the practice of organizations. This role is especially important when it comes to government communication, defends Bowen (2012).

Governmental public relations, according to Lee (2012), are a tool that qualifies public administration, since, in democratic societies, it is their duty to be close to citizens, informing them and engaging them in participation. In Sommerfeldt’s (2013) notion, public relations are necessary to ensure the involvement of relevant organizations in discussions on matters of public interest in the public sphere, thereby ensuring the health of democratic institutions and providing an informed public opinion.

Lee (2012) organizes the functions of government public relations into three categories: democratic, pragmatic, and political functions. Among the mandatory democratic functions, Lee (2012) highlights those that are linked to transparency: (a) relationship with the media, including responses to questions, inquiries and other requests; (b) accountability in the form of reports or other methods which help keep citizens informed; (c) the ability to respond to the public as citizens.

However, as L’Etang (2009) points out, the power to influence has been used by some governments to filter and distort information. Some critics have denounced that governmental communication is a mere manipulation strategy marked by a dissociation

between image and reality or between discourse and action (Canel, 2010), to the benefit of governments. Because media relations are one of the main roles of government public relations (Canel, 2018; Lee, 2012), their lack of transparency can reinforce distrust of the professional ethics of public relations.

The goals of the press office are to inform, communicate and influence public opinion about a particular organization, so persuasion is a concept intrinsic to the activity. The press office consists of managing the relationships of an organization with the press in order to influence the process of producing information with news standards for the dissemination, by sources, of events (Ribeiro, 2014). In Ribeiro's words, the activity encompasses journalism and public relations skills, being "totally impregnated with persuasion and propaganda" (2014, p. 71).

In the context of public administration, the press officer is responsible for expressing the organization's information policy through techniques that allow the convergence of interests: "the institution is interested in receiving good coverage and the media are interested in first-hand information" (Canel, 2010, p. 252).

In crisis management, the press office stands out as the activity responsible for informing the public about the organization's attitudes to solve the problem and minimize its impacts. According to Caetano, Vasconcelos and Vasconcelos (2006), the media is "one of the most difficult audiences" (p. 42) for crisis communication because of its influence on shaping public opinion. In line with these claims, Lampreia (2007) notes that "the way the media tell the 'story of the crisis'" (p. 81) is the best indicator of the effectiveness of crisis communication.

Among the most widely used press office techniques is the press release, content prepared in a journalistic style and sent to the media for publication. It is common for the press release to be published in the news section of the organization's website, a space that functions as a content repository. The success of a press release depends on its news value, because "it accepts entirely one of the most important news-values: public interest" (Ribeiro, 2014, p. 76).

In addition to press releases, crisis management also includes press conferences, statements, the preparation of spokespersons and the fulfillment of requests for press clarifications among the functions of the press office.

### **SITUATIONAL CRISIS COMMUNICATION THEORY (SCCT)**

We understand crisis as "an untimely but predictable event that has actual or potential consequences for stakeholder's interests as well as the reputation of the organization suffering the crisis" (Heath & Millar, 2004, p. 2). Crisis communication, according to Coombs (2010, p. 20), "revolves around collecting information about crisis risks, making decisions about how to manage potential crisis, and training people who will be involved in the crisis management process".

In relation to crisis communication strategies, advisory services can develop information management or meaning management, according to Coombs (2015). The former involves the mere dissemination of information related to the crisis, while the latter covers efforts to influence public perceptions. For Coombs (2015), crisis management should always adopt the meaning management strategy in its communication: “the discussion of crisis response strategies must consider the effects the crisis response strategies are intended to have upon stakeholders’ perceptions of the crisis situation” (Coombs, 2015, p. 142).

Meaning management tends to be a more effective strategy than information management as it considers variables that influence and reflect efforts to manage the meanings of the crisis. As Coombs states (2015, p. 141), to “communicate during a crisis does not mean you necessarily make the situation better”, the response to the crisis needs to be able to reduce its effects. It is up to the press office to assist in identifying the type of crisis in which the organization is involved and to choose the appropriate response strategy. To facilitate this process, Coombs (2007) has created a set of guidelines framed in situational crisis communication theory (SCCT).

The crisis response strategies can be “divided into three categories: instructing information, adjusting information, and reputation asset information” (Coombs, 2015, p. 142). *Instructing information* helps those involved to protect themselves physically during a crisis, as it contains a set of guidelines to ensure public safety. *Adjusting information* aims to reduce ambiguity over the crisis and aim to minimize its psychological effects. Finally, *reputation asset information* seeks to reduce the negative effects of the crisis on the organization’s image. The crisis communication model proposed in SCCT, therefore, can only be applied when the necessary responses to the physical and psychological protection of the individuals affected by the crisis have already been given.

According to Coombs (2007), reputations are based on “how stakeholders evaluate an organization’s ability to meet their expectations for treating stakeholders” (p.164). Thus, reputation formation relies on information that stakeholders receive about an organization, how it interacts and communicates directly or indirectly. Media-mediated information is considered as an indirect form of communication or second-hand information. Stakeholders find out about crises mostly through the news, but also because of social media (Coombs, 2007).

Coombs’ SCCT (2007) has as its starting point the attribution of responsibility for the crisis. If an organization is held accountable, the assignment is negative, the stakeholder feeling is anger, and the organization’s reputation is affected. If an organization is not held responsible for the crisis, the assignment is positive and the feeling evoked is that of sympathy. The media play a central role in attributing responsibility for a crisis and, consequently, in the emotion generated about an organization. After all, the press’ approach to a crisis influences public opinion.

In addition to initial crisis responsibility, two other variables can affect organizational reputation and stakeholder behavior: (1) crisis history – if it has experienced similar

crisis and (2) prior relational reputation – stakeholder management of previous crisis (Coombs, 2007, pp. 166-167).

Correctly identifying the type of crisis by determining the initial responsibility is the first step towards effective management of crisis communication. The measure allows us to anticipate the intensity of the threat to the reputation that the stakeholders will assign to the organization. The diagnosis of the crisis situation continues with an evaluation of the other two variables – crisis history and previous relational reputation – which can intensify or reduce threat levels.

The next step involves crisis response strategies. Coombs (2015) explains that “crisis response strategies are used to repair the reputation, reduce negative effects and prevent negative behavioral intentions” (p. 170). Based on previous research, Coombs (2015) has established a list of reparative response strategies that make up SCCT and are divided into two groups: primary responses and secondary or complementary responses.

PRIMARY RESPONSES		
<b>Deny</b>	Attack the accuser	The crisis manager confronts the person or group that claims something is wrong with the organization
	Denial	The crisis manager says there is no crisis
	Scapegoat	The crisis manager blames some person or group outside the organization for the crisis
<b>Diminish</b>	Excuse	The crisis manager minimizes organizational responsibility by denying intent to cause damage and/or by claiming inability to control the events that triggered the crisis
	Justification	The crisis manager minimizes the perceived damage caused by the crisis
<b>Rebuild</b>	Compensation	The crisis manager offers money or other gifts to the victims
	Apology	The crisis manager indicates that the organization takes full responsibility for the crisis and asks for forgiveness from the victims
SECONDARY RESPONSES		
<b>Bolstering</b>	Reminder	The crisis manager informs interested parties about the organization's past good work
	Ingratiation	The crisis manager praises the stakeholders and/or remembers the good work done in the past by the organization
	Victimage	The crisis manager reminds the interested parties that the organization is also a victim of the crisis

Table 3: SCCT'S reparative response to crisis strategies  
 Source: Drawn up by the authors based on Coombs (2007)

According to SCCT, the appropriate choice of reparative strategy response to the crisis, summarized in the above table, can protect the organization's reputation. Briefly: deny strategies attempt to remove any connection between the organization and the crisis. (...) The diminish crisis response strategies argue that a crisis is not as bad as people think (...). Rebuild strategies are the main avenue for generating new reputational assets. (...) All bolstering strategies are best used as supplements to the three primary strategies and adjusting information. (Coombs, 2007, pp. 171-172)

Although SCCT was developed for crisis management in the private sector, we found it relevant to apply the model to public administration and government. One example is Adkins’s research (2010) on the disaster caused by hurricane Katrina in the New Orleans region in 2005. It was a multilevel crisis involving management and communication of at least five government agencies, including the administration of President George W. Bush. Also in our study, we intend to analyze how the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic managed the communication of the June and October fires crisis, according to the criteria established by SCCT.

## METHODS

The research assumes that, in a digital communication scenario in which the roles of sender and receiver mix, only the press office – public information model – is an insufficient public relations strategy to produce adequate responses to any kind of crisis. The main objective of the research is, therefore, to find whether the communication strategy adopted by the Portuguese Presidency (Presidência da República Portuguesa, PRP) – its model and its discourses – for communication during the 2017 fires produced the appropriate response according to SCCT (Coombs, 2007). We opted for the qualitative method of discourse analysis (Daymon & Holloway, 2011) in order to examine the rhetorical aspects of the language used by the PRP from the set of guidelines proposed by Coombs (2007) and instrumented in the SCCT model.

The data gathering was by searching using the tool available on the PRP website with the keyword “incêndios” (fires) covering the “News”, “Interventions”, “Messages” and “President of the Republic” categories. We gathered all the content available for 14 days from the outbreak dates of the crisis situations under review (Pedrógão Grande tragedy June 17-30, 2017; October fires October 15-28, 2017).

In Table 4 we consolidate the corpus of this investigation and assign each of the eight pieces of content a letter (A-H) to make it easier to identify them in the discussion of the results.

DATA	CONTENT	TITLE	SPEECH
June 18, 2017	Video speech	Declaração do Presidente da República a propósito da tragédia de Pedrógão Grande (Statement by the President of the Republic regarding the Pedrógão Grande tragedy)	A
June 21, 2017	Press release	Presidente da República associa-se a minuto de silêncio em memória das vítimas (President of the Republic joins the minute’s silence in memory of the victims)	B
June 27, 2017	Press release	Concerto solidário “Juntos por Todos” (Solidarity concert “Juntos por Todos”)	C
October 15, 2017	Press release	Presidente da República acompanha evolução dos incêndios (President of the Republic follows the development of the fires)	D
October 16, 2017	Press release	Presidente da República reafirma urgência de agir (President of the Republic reaffirms urgency to act)	E

October 17, 2017	Press release	Presidente da República em Oliveira do Hospital (President of the Republic at Oliveira do Hospital)	F
October 17, 2017	Video speech	Declaração do Presidente da República ao país (Statement by the President of the Republic to the country)	G
October 23, 2017	Press release	Visitas do Presidente da República aos concelhos afetados pelos incêndios (Visit by the President of the Republic to the counties affected by the fires)	H

Table 4: *Corpus* summary table

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

According to SCCT (Coombs, 2007), the crisis triggered by the Pedrógão Grande tragedy in relation to the PRP falls into the “victimage” category, the “natural disaster” subcategory. Although it is common for forest fires to occur every summer in Portugal, due to the size of these fires and a number of victims never before recorded in the country’s history, the Portuguese population was surprised. Since 2003, Portugal had been able to control the occurrence of large forest fires, which led us to attribute the negative response to the existence of a similar history of crisis. These conditions contributed to our understanding that the PRP was also a victim of the Pedrógão Grande tragedy.

Following this perception, we found that the PRP never took on responsibility for the Pedrógão Grande tragedy, nor did the population consider that the President could have taken steps to prevent it. Thus, the Pedrógão Grande tragedy caused minimal attribution of responsibility and moderate threat to the PRP’s reputation, in line with what Coombs (2007) outlined.

The October fires, in relation to the PRP, fall into the category of “accidental crisis”. There was no intentionality, but inefficiency in the PRP in actions that could have prevented a repeat of the Pedrógão Grande tragedy. As a subcategory, the most appropriate framework is “challenge”. In the case of the October fires – and unlike what happened with the Pedrógão Grande tragedy – responsibility did lie with the PRP, but, by sharing responsibility for the crisis with the government, the potential impact on the PRP’s reputation is moderate. According to Coombs (2007), crises of this kind also impact minimal attributions of responsibility and moderate reputational threat.

That the PRP accepted responsibility for the crisis reinforces our findings, since this corroborates the population’s view that the state is one of the culprits (Faria, 2017). The history of similar forest fires in Portugal, notably the Pedrógão Grande tragedy, which occurred just four months earlier, contributed to the framing of the crisis in the challenge subcategory.

Regarding the crisis response strategy, both in the Pedrógão Grande tragedy and the October fires, the PRP adopted meaning management (Coombs, 2015). The strategy tends to be more efficient in reducing the effects of the crisis, as it acts on stakeholders’ perceptions. Coupled with an adjustment information strategy, it reflects efforts to

manage the meanings of the crisis and is able to reduce ambiguity and minimize the psychological effects caused for those involved (Coombs, 2007). The positive rating of the PRP, always above 69% between May and November 2017, according to data from the Barómetro Eurosondagem for *SIC/Expresso*, indicates a positive relationship reputation of the PRP with the Portuguese population<sup>3</sup>.

#### **CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING THE PEDRÓGÃO GRANDE TRAGEDY**

President Rebelo de Sousa's first official statement regarding the Pedrógão Grande tragedy took place on June 18 at Belém Palace in Lisbon, the President's official residence<sup>4</sup>. The speech, lasting three minutes and 35 seconds, was made available in video format on the PRP website.

President Rebelo de Sousa began speech A by stating that he had just decreed national mourning for three days in solidarity with the relatives of the victims of the Pedrógão Grande tragedy, a message that, according to Coombs (2007), falls in the "rebuild" primary response category, "compensation" subcategory. In the speech, the President expressed immeasurable pain and solidarity for the dozens of deaths and called the event "an almost unprecedented tragedy in the history of democratic Portugal".

Despite the intense pain, he noted the need to keep spirits up to continue fighting the fires in the region. He particularly thanked the firefighters, the Civil Protection Authority, the National Institute of Medical Emergency of Portugal (Inem), the Republican National Guard (GNR), the Judiciary Police, the Armed Forces, local authorities, health and social structures, and the anonymous people for their commitment and also offered support (secondary response bolstering, subcategory ingratiation). The President then mentioned the messages of support he had received from Pope Francis, heads of state and other international authorities, and said that he would go to the area the following day.

At his speech, President Rebelo de Sousa expressed the feelings of doubt, anguish and injustice to the victims, mostly because the fires directly affected the least privileged Portuguese people. He called it one of the "most difficult moments in our life as a nation" and called for unity: "we are one for Portugal" (secondary response "bolstering", subcategory "victimage").

Thus, we can say that the speech A response is connected to the "rebuild" primary category, "compensation" subcategory. Although Coombs (2007) has defined this subcategory as material offer, it is the one that best qualifies the response given by the PRP, since the President made available the resource within reach at that time: solidarity. When expressing gratitude to those involved in firefighting, the message also took over, in the background, characteristics of the bolstering secondary response category, ingratiation subcategory. The association of "bolstering" second category response, "victimage

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.eurosondagem.pt/inform/barometro%20orgaos%20opoder.htm#PresidenteRepublica>

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=131998>



“subcategory is due to use of the personal pronoun “we” in the last sentences of the speech.

The second official message from the PRP about the Pedrógão Grande tragedy was not issued until the 21<sup>st</sup>. With a three-line press release (speech B), the press office states that the President “joins the expression of grief voted on by Assembly of the Republic and will observe a minute’s silence (...), in Pedrógão Grande, in memory of the victims”. The last press release about the Pedrógão Grande tragedy of the series analyzed was published on the 27<sup>th</sup> (speech C)<sup>6</sup>. Short (only seven lines), the press release provided information about the presence of President Rebelo de Sousa at the “solidarity concert honoring the victims of the Pedrógão Grande fire”. The President’s offer of solidarity to the victims, devoting a minute’s silence to their memory and his presence at the concert “Juntos por Todos” (Together for All) led us to frame the messages of the 21<sup>st</sup> and 27<sup>th</sup> in the “rebuild” category, “compensation” subcategory (Coombs, 2007).

### **CRISIS COMMUNICATION DURING THE OCTOBER FIRES**

In the first press release (four lines) published shortly after the October fires broke out on the 15<sup>th</sup>, President Rebelo de Sousa, through his press office, expressed “solidarity with the people and the local authorities” (speech D)<sup>7</sup>. President Rebelo de Sousa also thanked the firefighters and civil protection structures that acted in the fight against fires and used the word “grief” to refer to the relatives of the victims. In a short message, the President reported that he had followed the events and expressed dismay. Because of these aspects, we fit the response into the “rebuild” primary category, “compensation” subcategory.

The press release issued by the PRP the day after (16<sup>th</sup>) the start<sup>8</sup> of the October fires followed the strategy of primary crisis response, “rebuild” category, “compensation” subcategory (nine lines). The President expressed urgency in stabilizing the fires and announced the cancellation of the week’s agenda to “follow the fire situation across the mainland” (speech E)<sup>9</sup>. Once again, he offered his physical presence to the affected areas, so we saw a subtle transition in tone from dismay to scrutiny when President Rebelo de Sousa announced that he was awaiting an assessment of the tragedy and called for “a change of point of view translated into acts rather than words”. We understand that the President of the Republic was referring, even if not expressly, to the government when demanding action, which is pertinent to his duties as head of state.

Even on the 17<sup>th</sup>, the PRP’s press office reported the President’s trip to Oliveira do Hospital, “one of the counties with the most fatal victims following last Sunday’s forest

<sup>5</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=132011>

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=132039>

<sup>7</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136854>

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136884>

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136887>

fires” (speech F)<sup>10</sup>. The five-line press release announced a live speech by President Rebelo de Sousa in the evening. The message was consistent with the previous ones in terms of response category and subcategory (“rebuild”, “compensation”), as it demonstrated the President’s willingness to be close to the victims and the prudence to closely follow the consequences of the tragedy and only then to speak.

President Rebelo de Sousa started a speech (duration 11 minutes and 35 seconds) full of emotion. He began by positioning himself as a Portuguese citizen. In the excerpt “the President of the Republic is above all a person. A person who will forever retain in his memory images such as the image of Pedrógão” (speech G)<sup>11</sup>, he identified himself as a “citizen of flesh and blood”. He did not, however, victimize himself or the PRP institution, but expressed empathy with the local authorities, the people and the fire brigade, among others that were cited following the speech, referring to their efforts to save lives and property.

The President then alluded to the number of fire deaths of the year (over 100 deaths in four months in Portugal) and stressed that the coldness of the numbers could not “minimize or trivialize” the tragedy. When the President announced that “these more than 100 dead will never leave my mind, as a huge burden on my conscience as well as on my presidential term”, he acknowledged responsibility for the crisis; the primary response was slanted towards the subcategory “apology”, “rebuild” category. The President repeated the mention of 100 deaths four times throughout his speech.

President Rebelo de Sousa’s speech (speech G) continued with an admission of relative responsibility (primary response category “diminish”, subcategory “excuse”). By saying that he was “elected to unconditionally serve the Portuguese people, to fulfill and enforce a Constitution that intends to guarantee the confidence of the citizens”, he placed his responsibility within the scope of his duties as head of state. From this point on, Rebelo de Sousa’s speech became more emphatic, listing the elements that weakened the population and structures in the face of the tragedies caused by the fires in Portugal in 2017.

The President pointed out the “decades of disorder or failure to comply with the law”, “the inadequacy of structures or people in the face of weather conditions, the size and nature of fires so different from those they were used to”, the delay in publishing the report of the parliamentary committee that investigated the Pedrógão Grande tragedy, “the growing denunciation of mayors regarding possibly unpunished crimes at the origin of the fires” and the “powerlessness of society and the public authorities in the face of such a confluence of disasters”, thus including other entities in those responsible for the crisis.

The final part of President Rebelo de Sousa’s speech tried to provide “a quick and convincing answer” and demanded the same from the government. At that time, the

<sup>10</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136886>

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.presidencia.pt/?idc=10&idi=136935>

PRP's official crisis communication took on a timely approach to the information management strategy by announcing measures that could and should be taken by the President of the Republic and, in particular, by demanding from the government certain actions, including a guarantee of compensation to victims.

In addition, he challenged the Assembly of the Republic to establish whether or not to “keep the government in office”, in accordance with the sovereign body's understanding of the government's ability under prime minister António Costa to carry out “indispensable and unavoidable” actions.

To conclude, the President apologized to the victims of the fires, when the response to the crisis therefore also took on the characteristics of “rebuild”, “apology”. The last press release (six lines) on the October fires of the series analyzed was published on the 23<sup>rd</sup> (speech H) and reported on President Rebelo de Sousa's visits to the municipalities hit by the fires. The tone of regret and the announcement of more visits cause the announcement to fall into the “rebuild” category, “compensation” subcategory.

The crisis generated by the Pedrógão Grande tragedy, when analyzed from a SCCT perspective (Coombs, 2007), placed the PRP in the position of victim. The June 2017 fires were considered a natural disaster, the result of catastrophic confluence of a range of environmental and human factors. The October fires, in turn, generated a crisis classified as accidental and constituted a challenge to be overcome by the Portuguese state together with society. Regarding Pedrógão Grande, the PRP was not implicated in the crisis, as explained in the previous section. However, the same cannot be said about the October fires. The PRP accepted responsibility for the crisis, just as the population blamed it for the tragedy that occurred.

In addition to the initial attribution of responsibility for the crisis, with regard to the variables, what distinguished the Pedrógão Grande tragedy from the October fires was the history of the crisis. While the first crisis was perceived as a natural disaster, the occurrence of a similar crisis within just four months showed how inefficient the Portuguese authorities were in taking steps to avert a new tragedy. Thus, the crisis history variable added elements to the October fires to make it a crisis with a strong potential for negative impact on President Rebelo de Sousa's reputation.

However, the population realized that the responsibility was not exclusive to the PRP, but shared with the government and other actors, which meant that the crisis had a weak level of responsibility for the PRP regarding both the Pedrógão Grande tragedy and the October fires. The moderate level of reputational threat was achieved thanks to the President's previous satisfactory relational reputation, as shown in the Barómetro Eurosondagem data (see table 2), which indicated a positive rating always above 69% between May and November 2017<sup>12</sup>.

From the analysis of the official PRP communication from June 17 to 30 and October 15 to 28, 2017, for the crises known as the Pedrógão Grande tragedy and October fires,

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<sup>12</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.eurosondagem.pt/inform/barometro%20orgaos%20poder.htm#PresidenteRepublica>

we conclude that the PRP opted for the meaning management strategy of adjustment information and predominance of the primary reparative responses of the rebuild category and subcategory compensation as management strategies. And, given the results of the Barómetro Eurosondagem for *SIC/Expresso*, we can say that the PRP's crisis communication during the 2017 fires was efficient in preserving the organization's reputation.

## CONCLUSION

The seriousness of the consequences caused by the fires in Portugal makes this a subject of public interest to be studied by the various fields of science. Regarding communication, we were interested in investigating the strategies, responses and impact of the crisis on organizational reputation, more specifically on the Presidency of the Portuguese Republic (PRP), personified by Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa. The case of President Rebelo de Sousa demonstrated that choices may derive from the personal characteristics of the main interlocutor, such as the President's mastery of journalistic production and his lack of confidence in digital media.

In our case study, we found that the 2017 fires in Portugal generated a serious crisis with international repercussions. Images of Portuguese firefighters trying to contain the fire, the desperation of the victims' relatives and the totally charred trees spread around the world, placing the country and its authorities in the spotlight.

Consistent with the communication policy implemented since the inauguration of President Rebelo de Sousa, the 2017 fire crisis also saw the PRP use the press to get its messages to the population. Although he had a complete press office structure at his disposal, the President preferred to relate directly with journalists, often surprising his aides (Lopes & Botelho, 2019). The small number of messages produced by the press office in our corpus of analysis (three and five messages produced in the two weeks following the outbreaks of the Pedrógão Grande tragedy and the October fires, respectively) confirms the President's predilection for communication without intermediaries.

The PRP's crisis reporting during the 2017 fires is a case in which the variables – crisis responsibility, crisis history, and previous relational reputation – were more relevant than the actual messages themselves. This conclusion is related to President Rebelo de Sousa's personality, known as the “president-celebrity” and the “president of affections” due to the proximity that he has established with the Portuguese people. But it is also owed to “press support for presidential initiatives” (Lopes & Espírito Santo, 2019, p. 255) that “reinforces presidential communication strategy” (Lopes & Espírito Santo, 2019, p. 243).

From the analysis of the PRP's official communication during the 2017 fires according to SCCT parameters (Coombs, 2007), we infer that the PRP opted to send messages identified as adjustment information with the predominance of the rebuild primary category, compensation subcategory (Coombs, 2007). The information classes provided by

Coombs (2007) are not mutually exclusive, so it is possible to find instructing, adjusting and reputational asset information in the same answer. Similarly, a reparative response strategy may have a predominance of adjusting information.

Finally, we emphasize that the case study showed that the PRP's adherence to the public information model did not impair the efficiency of its communication and that the press office is a fundamental public relations strategy in crisis communication. However, when opting for press relations as the only strategy, one needs to be aware that results may be conditional on the crisis variables as well as the communicative ability of the key interlocutor.

For public relations professionals responsible for the strategic communication of an organization, whether public or private, we indicate that it is essential to include a plan that covers all phases of crisis communication – pre-crisis, crisis and post-crisis. Crisis communication planning allows public relations to act pre-emptively and prepare the organization to respond appropriately to each situation. In addition to press relations, professionals should include, whenever possible, other strategies to ensure communication that promotes dialogue and the quality of relationships between an organization and its stakeholders.

Translation: Bianca Persici Toniolo and Gisela Gonçalves

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## **THE ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS PROFESSIONALS IN CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSABILITY: SOME NOTES FROM THE PORTUGUESE REALITY**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Are public relations (PR) professionals involved in the decision-making processes concerning corporate citizenship (CC) or are they only asked to report the organizations' best practices? Are organizations committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR) or corporate citizenship? In the framework of a pragmatist paradigm, a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach was developed. This method is a two-phase design that is characterized by an initial quantitative phase of data collection and analysis, followed by a qualitative phase of data collection and analysis. An invitation to answer an online survey was sent to all 158 organizations that belonged to an association for the promotion of CSR in Portugal (Grace), in October 2018. Afterwards, face-to-face interviews with the CSR/CC responsible were conducted to those organizations that answered the survey. The research showed that the social (philanthropic) area emerged as the most relevant one in all the organizations interviewed, even though the area seems to be under strong reformulations. Corporations tend to choose CSR as the main concept and dislike the concept of corporate citizenship, that is, the idea of being both a social and political actor. PR practitioners seem to have fewer responsibilities than those the researchers expected to find out, at least at a strategic level.

### **KEYWORDS**

public relations; corporate citizenship; corporate social responsibility

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## **O PAPEL DOS PROFISSIONAIS DE RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS NA RESPONSABILIDADE SOCIAL CORPORATIVA: ALGUMAS NOTAS A PARTIR DA REALIDADE PORTUGUESA**

### **RESUMO**

Os profissionais de relações públicas (RP) são envolvidos nos processos de decisão sobre cidadania corporativa (CC) ou apenas são chamados a divulgar as práticas das organizações a este nível? As organizações estão comprometidas com a responsabilidade social corporativa (RSC) ou com a cidadania corporativa? No âmbito de um paradigma pragmatista, foi desenvolvida uma abordagem explicativa sequencial recorrendo a métodos mistos. Foi realizada uma investigação em duas fases, uma fase inicial quantitativa de recolha e análise de dados, e de

seguida uma fase de recolha e análise de dados qualitativa. Em outubro de 2018, foram convidadas a responder a um inquérito online as 158 organizações que pertencem a uma associação portuguesa para a promoção da CC (Grace). Posteriormente, foram realizadas entrevistas presenciais com o responsável pela RSC/CC organizações que responderam ao questionário. O estudo aponta para que a área social (filantrópica) seja a mais relevante nas organizações entrevistadas e que esta área da RSC está sob fortes reformulações. No entanto, as organizações parecem não utilizar o conceito de cidadania corporativa. Ao contrário do esperado pelos investigadores, os profissionais de comunicação parecem não assumir responsabilidades a nível estratégico.

#### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

relações públicas; cidadania corporativa; responsabilidade social corporativa

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

The option for the concept of “corporate citizenship” (CC) (Woot, 2013, 2016) in the context of this project is not altogether innocent. By using it in detriment of some other notions as those of “enterprise social responsibility” or “corporate social responsibility” (CRS), the authors wish to emphasize their concern with aspects others than those that could be subsumed under the idea of hands-out philanthropy. In general terms, CSR can be defined as the ways in which corporations are voluntarily responsible to and for society in broad terms (Matten & Moon, 2008). Assuming the possibility of some overlapping of the concepts, the concept of CC will also be discussed. Corporate citizenship should be understood here as encompassing some activities, that in the last three decades emerged as being important for companies that we can consider as entering the sphere of the political, addressing diseases in Africa or boycotting South-Africa during the apartheid.

Moreover, the discussion concerning the real status of CSR/CC in Portugal has not been done yet. In a certain sense we are still living in a post Friedman (1970) era where both business persons and politicians tend to consider, or at least that is their official statement, that public affairs should be left to politician and public officials. In a country where the influence of neo-corporatist institutional structures still have such a great power, corporations tend to deny, however, in quite a vehement way, their involvement in political life. However, it is not this paper’s purpose to discuss this concept and its philosophical implications. Its use here is only due to the fact that the authors wanted to understand in senses others than the most common accepted ones, the motives, purposes and implications of organizations with the public good. Also, a special interest was taken in those organizations that consider themselves as preoccupied with being responsible towards the planet and the people, beyond the best well known Friedman’s (1970) idea that their level of liability was to generate profit for the shareholders, and therefore belong to a specific association that has as its mission to promote “corporate citizenship” as is explicitly stated in Grace mission.

The main research questions are precisely what do the organizations that belong to the Portuguese association for the development of corporate citizenship (Grace), define

as being their main social responsible principles, policies and practices. The association congregates 158 organizations from both the private and non-governmental sectors, as well as some state-owned enterprises. How do organizations define CSR/CC? Are they mainly concerned with economic, social or environmental issues? Is reputation, a good name, their main preoccupation? What publics are involved in CSR activities? Is CC/CSR a planned process? What is, and what do the organizations think it will be, the main role of communication professionals in the near future in the development and implementation of better and more responsible policies?

#### **STRATEGIC COMMUNICATION AND THE CONCEPTS OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND CORPORATE CITIZENSHIP**

Paraphrasing Woot (2016), facing the contemporary reality, in these last years of the second decade of the XXI century, in a world that so many designate under the acronym VUCA (volatile, unpredictable, complex and ambiguous), it seems urgent to rethink not only of a new political paradigm, a new way of life for all of us, but also to rethink of the responsibility of our organizations, our institutions, our corporations in improving the lives of so many people around the world and, of course, in preserving the planet, our common home. In this paper against so many ideas that tend to consider the concepts of public relations (PR) or institutional communication as mere instrumental contributors to the report function of so many organizations, authors consider communication as constitutive of the organizations and of all the human practices and tend to see, as well, the PR functions as being pervasive to all organizational levels from the operational to the managerial and strategic one (Dozier, 1992; Steyn & Puth, 2000).

Rather than the notion of mission or vision, it is the notion of purpose that guides organizational practices and performances and positions them in global ecosystems as partners with other companies or entities from other sectors. In this context the concept of “corporate social responsibility (CSR)” must be understood in a sense where the notions of sustainability or accountability will be as more fruitful and genuine as they will be more intertwined with the organization’s purpose and inscribed in the organization’s DNA. The neo-capitalist society that led to the financial crisis of 2007/08 in our democratic eastern countries challenged the way stakeholders see and understand corporations. Today, companies must regain values that have been lost for a few decades and that lead them to assume their role as citizens in communities, with their rights and duties, as each and every one of us (Moon, 2014). The choice we made for the notion of “corporate citizenship” is intentional, a concept that emerges in recent years as rescuing some of the ideas prevailing in western societies before the neoliberal turn of the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The idea of “corporate citizenship” is used in today’s world by large organizations, and there is also a publication dedicated exclusively to the theme, *The Journal of Corporate Citizenship* (quarterly magazine published in the United Kingdom)<sup>1</sup>. In the perspective of the first publisher of this publication, “true corporate

<sup>1</sup> Ver <https://www.jstor.org/journal/jcorpciti>

citizenship involves much more than what has traditionally been called CSR” (Waddock 2003, p. 3). This notion still has other contours due to the global dimension of many multinational companies and questions concerning the way these companies deal with suppliers, with producers, so many times belonging to the most disadvantaged regions in the world, for instance. The concept of CC seems to be a more powerful one than the CSR one encompassing actions towards the development and well-being of society beyond the ideas of voluntary actions by organizations, it assumes the idea that corporations may see themselves as broad societal change-agents by acting as citizens towards governments or other companies.

Probably nothing better represents the world we live in as the expression the “butterfly effect”. Both in a literal and metaphorical sense, this expression that reproduces one of the fundamental principles of chaos theory, reminds us that the social and environmental problems are the greatest challenges posed to organizations today and that both are global dilemmas. If the pollution of rivers or oceans has no borders, the precariousness to use the expression that Standing (2011, 2014) enshrined, with which the new generations will be confronted, is also a concept with no geographical boundaries. As Hulme and Arun (2009) have put it so well, in this new century where all processes are complex and relationships are constantly changing, it will depend on the capacity of interaction between the private sector, the public sector and civil society to support both growth capacity building and to meet social/environmental needs.

The companies are asked to assume themselves as citizens of this global world, with their rights, and their duties (Santos & Eiró-Gomes, 2016, 2017). To paraphrase Patten (2005) in a theoretical framework that we can call an “ethics of duty” a clearly modern paradigm, to act well is, in the end, to act in our best interest. In 2001 the European Commission in its Green Paper on this subject made it very clear that the concept – at the time called corporate social responsibility – should be understood as a concept representing social, environmental and economic concerns in its interactions with all stakeholders on a voluntary basis. If you want, this is the key word. When a company has inclusion policies, emits less CO<sub>2</sub>, or pays fairly to its suppliers, when it refuses production chains where child labor exists, or when it promotes wage policies that reduce pay scales because it believes that this is how it should act, here we can talk about CSR. If the concept of CSR goes back to the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with what is generally referred to as Christian-inspired philanthropy (Tirole, 2016), in the late decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it entails three broad, non-mutually exclusive lines: a sustainable vision, delegated philanthropy and business philanthropy (Tirole, 2016). In the specific context of corporate communications authors such as Argenti (2007) speak of CSR, understanding the role of the communication departments as promoters and “reporters” of responsible business optics, stressing the triad reputation, communication and CSR. Precursors of much of what the best has been written in public relations, as early as 1995, White and Mazur wrote about the importance of PR in establishing community relations; relations that presupposed the development of mutually beneficial partnerships between organizations and their surroundings from a long-term perspective.

Prout (1997) also inscribes the CSR issues in the field of community relations, which is also more or less the same idea recently advocated by Wilcox, Cameron and Xifra (2012). It should be noted, however, that even if the authors use the concepts of “corporate philanthropy” and “environmental relations” they do not use it exactly as we would envisage, that is, with a dimension of proficuous and egalitarian relationships among all those concerned. We should also emphasize the inclusion of some other quite common concepts when we talk about communication and CSR, namely, concepts such as those of reputation (Stangis & Smith, 2017) or crisis communication (Herzig & Kuhn, 2017; Whelan, 2017). In a perspective closer to what we can call an African school and privileging notions such as “social investment” authors such as Skinner or Lessen (Skinner, Essen, Mersham & Motau, 2007) cannot be neglected special as they also allow the proper reconfiguration of some other disciplines such as the one of public relations (Eiró-Gomes & Lourenço, 2009; Lourenço, 2009). In recent years and against our best judgment there seem to be emerging some trends in public relations that tend to create new concepts and new areas of specialization. Some authors and professionals may perceive the concept of “CSR communication” as a new field in public relations / Corporative communication, which may be seen as an action of the general policies of CSR and institutional communication, with merely operative functions. This goes against the idea of a strategic and constitutive vision of public relations and of organizational communication (Dozier, 1992; Steyn & Puth, 2000). As Steyn and Puth (2000) put it, this role is one of “monitoring relevant environmental developments and anticipating their consequences for the organization’s policies and strategies, especially with regard to relationships with stakeholders” ( p. 20).

It seems that the PR function will never get rid of the less proficuous aspects of its history notably the way it was seen as just “windows-dressing”. Never as in the last decades the concepts of “greenwashing” or “window-dressing” have been put in so much use to speak about PR and the so many organizations that did not respect all that is expected from them and should configure theirs CSR practices: labor standards, respect for human rights and climate change. Expressions as those of “it is just PR”, or “just PR manoeuvres” to label CSR practices as they are reported in owned, paid or even earned media are common among common citizens. These issues were quite relevant while framing this research as very little is known about how state-owned and particularly private companies in Portugal deal with not only the CSR issues but peculiarly with the role of communication in promoting, developing or reporting their activities. A not minor aspect is precisely the lack of trust in both the private and public sector organizations, that seems pervasive a bit all over the world as well as how that lack of trust is impacting the way PR practitioners are seen and their work understood in the most diverse organizations.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

In the framework of a pragmatist worldview, a sequential explanatory mixed methods approach was developed. The sequential explanatory approach is one of the three

kinds of mixed methods basic designs proposed by Creswell (Creswell, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2018) concomitantly with the convergent parallel and the exploratory sequential. In the case of the convergent parallel mixed method design the qualitative and quantitative data are treated in parallel and compared in order to see if the findings confirm or refute each other, while in the exploratory one the quantitative data collection and analysis follows the qualitative phase aiming to a future possible generalization of the findings.

In the case of the sequential explanatory, the qualitative findings help to explain the quantitative results and offer an in-depth understanding of the situation under investigation. This is a two-phase design that is characterized by an initial quantitative phase of data collection and analysis, followed by a phase of qualitative data collection and analysis. If it is true that the first results help framing the kind of qualitative questions that must be asked to participants it is important to note that one of the most relevant aspects of this kind of inquiry is that the qualitative findings help to confirm and explain the data found during the quantitative phase.

An invitation to answer an online survey was sent to all the 158 organizations in October 2018. The invitation was sent to the responsible for the department that dealt with questions connected to the general designated CSR area or when not acknowledged by the organization to the public email. The same invitation was sent at least three times more, and always by email, in November and at least three phone calls were attempted to those that did not answer either positively or negatively before considering that those organizations were not available to answer the survey. Only five explicitly declined the invitation. Excepting those questions that dealt with a characterization of the organization that were open-ended all the other questions were closed-ended ones (selected-response questions). A great care was taken while constructing them in order to ensure the responses were mutually exclusive, except in the case of the multiple responses possibility cases, as well as that they were clear, short and used an easily understood language. The questions were organized in six groups covering six main areas in accordance with the research questions and sub-questions.

As it is quite common to misunderstand and misinterpret this type of questions a pilot study was developed, and the instruments were tested in a small group of volunteers and all the corrections due necessities introduced. The cover letter with the explanation of the study as well as the instructions for its fulfilment were also tested. According to the preconized method for a sequential mixed methods approach analysis proceed independently for each phase. A content quantitative analysis of the 43 surveys received were developed. Afterwards, and as not all of those that answered the survey were available for the second phase, a new analysis was promoted using only the surveys of those 27 organizations that would be considered in the study.

After the surveys were received all the respondents were contacted first by phone and afterwards by email in order to be interviewed. In January 2019 all those that had not answered (positively or negatively) were contacted at least three times by phone and email before considering that those organizations were not available to be interviewed.

Between November 2018 and January 2019 face-to-face interviews with the CSR/ CC responsible were conducted to those organizations that accepted the invitation to be interviewed.

Interviews (according to an open script) were the research instrument chosen for the second phase as they are a useful form of data collection allowing the exploration of the perspectives and perceptions of the interviewees (Daymon & Holloway, 2002). Researchers used this kind of data collection method precisely in order to gather information about all the aspects concerning CSR/CC and public relations (corporate communication) work in these organizations in an in-depth way. These participants were asked to define CSR and CC in their own terms and to discuss their thoughts about how the concepts were understood in their firms. Moreover, participants were asked which one in general used concepts seemed to represent in a better way each organizational practice. A great interest was put on understanding how these actors saw the role of the communication professionals, their competences and capacities, how decision-making processes were conducted in relation to the design of the CSR/CC policies and practices and the specific role of the communication specialists in developing and (or) reporting the mentioned policies and practices.

Researchers used this kind of data collection method precisely in order to gather information about all the aspects previously mentioned. A total of 27 interviews were conducted, each lasting between 30 and 120 minutes, the mode being situated in an hour. Generally, only one person was interviewed per organization but in two cases even though the main respondent was the CSR/CC coordinator other person was present during the interview. In the discussion of the themes, organizations (in the few cases of more than one respondent per organization no distinction between them will be made) will be referred to using numbers. All the interviews were verbatim transcribed. Only at the end of all the interviews did the researchers read the transcripts and get the sense of the overall data collected as well as reflected on its overall meaning.

One of the main objectives in data analysis in qualitative research is to reduce the volume of raw material and aggregate the data into certain categories in accordance to the research goals in order to be able to communicate the essence of what the data revealed. Therefore, a qualitative content analysis was developed starting with the definition of the coding frame. A coding frame, or as it might be less misleading a classification frame (Seidman, 2013) is a way of structuring the material under analysis. It consists of major categories, also called dimensions, specifying the most relevant aspects, and subcategories for each major category, detailing themes and meanings related to each one of the main dimensions (Schreier, 2012). The main categories are the aspects in which the analysis will be focused. The subcategories, in turn, reflect what the material exhibits about the main categories. The categories have been defined in a concept-driven way based in both the literature review as well as a previous floating documental analysis. They express also the interests of the researchers. As Seidman (2013) puts it in reducing the material interviewers have begun to analyze, interpret, and make meaning of it. The subcategories however were only defined after having read all the material transcribed in

what is in general designated as data-driven way. The data-driven strategy is inductive as it generates the sub-categories in accordance with the information present in the material under review.

The concept driven strategy is in general understood as being a deductive process where the categories are defined according to the previous literature review and the research questions that in certain sense express the purposes of the investigation. In this kind of work and to use the words of Schreier (2012) it is often useful to use simultaneous concept and data driven categories. That was precisely the researcher's decision. Under each of the main dimensions and when relevant some sub-categories were open in an inductive process, that is, they emerged from the object.

It is usually understood that if the aim of the research is to describe in quite a precise and comprehensive way the content of the interviews, as it is in the present case, this is quite an acceptable strategy (Schreier, 2012). As Saldaña (2016) puts it descriptive coding "assigns labels to data to summarize in a word or short phrase (...) the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 292). All the material was hand categorized following the methodological prescriptions for this kind of qualitative data analysis. Maybe it is worth recalling that in qualitative analysis the most relevant is not to count occurrences of certain words or phrases but to rearrange the data in organizational categories, or topics (Maxwell, 2013), as some authors prefer to call them, that enable researchers to separate material bearing on a given topic from other data.

When speaking about validity in the realm of a pragmatist perspective and in special in the area of the qualitative research things cannot be understood exactly either in the way they are in the exclusive quantitative research or as they are in the constructivist approaches that deny its possibility. Following Maxwell (2013) the concept is used here in its common sense interpretation to refer to the correctness of the explanations and interpretations offered. Two main aspects are important and have been addressed: the researchers bias and the reactivity of the respondents. Even if unavoidable, researchers were at least conscient of both mentioned problems. The verbatim transcripts of the interviews and the support of a research assistant in doing so, as well as the respondent validations of the data were used to minimize the researchers bias. In order to downplay the reactivity of the respondents leading questions were totally and consciously avoided. Using the mixed methods approach as well as an assessment of public documents in order to confirm data and get a better view of the all context were also ways to reduce the threats to validity.

In the present research considering the qualitative analysis of the data six main categories or dimensions were developed using a concept-driven strategy:

1. corporate social responsibility (CSR)/corporate citizenship (CC) (conceptualizations) – all the words or phrases denoting the labels, a definition or explanation of the concepts;
2. reasons and activities – under this category all the manifest messages that dealt with the motives or the main concerns were considered as the activities/issues included under the CSR responsibility, as volunteering, community relations, work-life balance;
3. publics – all the publics that were called to participate in the CSR policies definition or in CSR activities were considered, as well as the main beneficiary of the actions;



4. CSR management – in this category have been considered all the strategic planning or technical aspects of CSR policies and practices – planning, implementing, budgeting and evaluating;
5. Communication – under this category all the data concern with all the communication/PR role were considered, in accordance with the three levels proposed by different authors (Dozier, 1992; Steyn and Puth, 2000). Three sub-categories have been opened: strategic, managerial; technician;
6. CSR: the way ahead – under this dimension we considered all data associated to future perspectives and concepts, visions, challenges and trends.

## PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

The six main categories previously introduced will be used to guide the presentation and discussion of results. Additionally, it is important to refer that even though the qualitative and quantitative data analysis has been done separately, the conclusions will be here presented together.

Concerning the concepts used to make reference to the sustainability commitment there is a wide use of the “corporate social responsibility” concept among the Grace associates. Only in few organizations under study in this research an intentional use of the concept “corporate citizenship” was found. Although, Grace positions itself as a “group of reflection and support to the corporate citizenship”<sup>2</sup>.

In terms of the conceptual definition of CSR given by the organizations, a unanimous answer was not possible to identify. In all definitions introduced, researchers could distinguish between first, the aim/purpose/goal/intention of CSR and, second, the focus/content of the CSR. The corporate social responsibility aims have been described in quite different ways, varying from the classical definition according to the European Commission’ Green Paper (2001, p.7) as the “voluntary integration of corporate social and ecological concerns into their business activities and their relationships with their stakeholders”, to other different intentions. With the same relevance as the “voluntary integration of the CSR concerns”, emerged the purpose “contribute”. Thereafter, the most frequent aims referred were “responsibility”, “social role” and “reduce the impact”. After, two organizations introduced the corporate social responsibility efforts as a “commitment”. Lastly, and being referred just once, arise goals as “concern”, “policy”, “duty”, “requirements integration”, “management method”. There is one concept that is used by some organizations as an aim and simultaneously by others as a focus, namely: “sustainability”.

When focusing on the CSR focus/content, the two most appointed concerns “volunteering initiatives” and “community relations”, thus, we can conclude that the social initiatives emerge as the first preference of the inquired organizations. The third most referred options were “environment” and “diversity. With a higher number of answers than expected emerged the “work-life balance” showing that these kinds of concerns are arising as a priority when exploring the CSR field in organizations. Not surprising is the fact that “salary equity” is the less referred content, showing that there still is a long way to go concerning this relevant, but not yet seriously worked issue.

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.fmam.pt/imprensa/noticias/tema-1/grace-grupo-de-reflexão-e-apoio-à-cidadania-empresarial/>

Lastly, during the inquiry process, the respondents were asked to nominate one word that they immediately related to corporate social responsibility. Forty-three words were introduced, from which 13 were used more than once and only those were analyzed (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Words introduced as related to corporate social responsibility

Credits: Mafalda Eiró-Gomes and Ana Raposo

Using a cloud of concepts to interpret the data gathered at this point, one main word appeared: “sustainability”. In fact, this concept seems to become more important when someone wants to make reference to the CSR investments. Thereafter, with the same relevance emerged the words “commitment” and “impact”. Interesting is also the fact that the word “citizenship” appeared in a prominent position, as well as “responsibility”.

When questioned about what are the reasons to invest in CSR, the majority appointed “reputation” as the main cause to promote CSR actions. Thereafter, the most chosen option was “consumers demands”. As a matter of fact, we can say that this option expresses a concern directly related to the stakeholder’s perception, enhancing the importance of “reputation” in this context.

At this point, it could be interesting to share some excerpts of the interviews conducted, that due to the number of times they were repeated became relevant. As said before, we have decided to keep quotes anonymous, as their aim is merely to demonstrate trends. One organization said “we chose the projects not only by its importance, but also because of the return on investment that we can have for the organization” (Organization 1). Similarly, other organization stated, “increasingly, the requirements of our clients go that way. (...) For example, we start to have requests related to the national production. (...) Clearly, our economic objectives are aligned with our environmental and sustainability objectives” (Organization 2).

The investors’ interest seems to contribute similarly to the decision to promote CSR actions. Finally, some organizations introduced other reasons to justify their decisions concerning CSR, being the most frequent answers “community and society development” and “employees motivation”.

Relevant is the fact that, even though “Government incentives” was the least referred reason (two times), 17 out of the 27 organizations under study answered “yes” when asked if they employ to Law Patronage.

With regard to the second subcategory of this dimension – CSR content –, the two most highlighted concerns are “voluntary initiatives” and “community relations”, and we can conclude that social initiatives emerge as the first preference of the surveyed organizations. The third most frequently mentioned option was as often “environment” and “diversity”. With a higher number of answers than expected, came the “work-life balance”, showing that this type of concern emerges as a priority within CSR in organizations. Not surprisingly, “wage equity” is the least mentioned, showing that there is still a long way to go on this relevant issue, but not yet seriously worked out.

Under the category number three, it was significant to understand which stakeholders were engaged in CSR initiatives. The organizations under study referred with the same frequency the public “community” and “employees”. Next, “partners” emerged as the third most frequent public introduced. With less prevalence appeared “clients” and “suppliers” and, in the end, the “investors”.

Let’s now focus on issues related to the corporate social responsibility management, namely: planning, implementing, budgeting and evaluation of CSR (category number four). The majority (20 out of 27) of the inquired institutions declared to have a concrete strategic plan for corporate social responsibility. In the same way, when questioned if the CSR issues are part of the global strategic plan of the organization the great majority answered “yes” (24 out of 27). In addition, researchers tried to evaluate if this function could be outsourced, totally or partially, as a complement to the work done in-house. Here the results showed that the organizations under study tend to not work in an outsourcing model in what concerns to CSR consultancy, only nine out of the 27 organizations answered “yes”.

Regarding CSR implementation, the majority of the organizations declared to have regular initiatives (23 out of 27). Additionally, organizations were asked whether there was a specific budget targeting CSR initiatives. The findings showed that this is a sensitive topic for the respondents, avoiding to share details about it. Half of the organizations said to not have a special CSR budget (14 out of 27), therefore the costs with CSR initiatives are assumed by marketing, corporate communications, safety and environment departments.

Even though, “impact” had emerged as one of the most cited words related to CSR by the organizations, the face-to-face interviews were helpful to conclude that there is still room for improvement in terms of impact assessment. In few organizations was possible to find intentional efforts and formal processes to evaluate the impact of the CSR investments. There is a clear notion among the organizations that a different approach is needed: “up to now we didn’t use evaluation metrics. We still don’t have CSR impact evaluation (...). It’s a gap that we have” (Organization 1); “there isn’t (impact evaluation), but it’s our aim to implement it from now on” (Organization 3).

The role of communication in CSR processes had also been explored in this study. Therefore, on a first moment, organizations were questioned about how they communicate the CSR initiatives (technician subcategory). The majority of the respondents declared to use emails and the website to communicate CSR. Next, the intranet, events,

social networks, newsletter and internal publications were referred as relevant instruments to promote those initiatives. The results points to a higher investment in internal communication instruments in what concerns to CSR. Moreover, less than half of the organizations invest in media relations and only three use advertising campaigns to communicate CSR issues. Finally, just one organization viewed the sustainability report as a way to communicate CSR.

In this regard, to understand how CSR activities were reported and publicized, organizations were asked if they have sustainability reports. The results were quite surprising because less than half of the organizations had a specialized CSR report (12 out of 27). This conclusion enhanced the need for a new understanding and more investments to develop sustainability reports.

In order to have a deeper comprehension about the quantitative results and to understand the role of communication in CSR, during the interviews the researchers focus on this specific subject. As the budget, the communication seems to be a sensible issue. Some organizations inclusively stated that CSR efforts should not be communicated – “we only publicize internally. We don’t want people to see CSR investments as brand management” (Organization 4). On the other hand, among organizations with more than ten years of CSR investment, interviewees stated “we’ll start to communicate this year. Our priority is to improve the communication with our employees” (Organization 5). Others stated “internally we publicize CSR a lot. (...) We aim to promote the initiatives among the employees. Externally, we don’t invest much, doesn’t make sense for us to promote it” (Organization 3) or “we only communicate CSR initiatives if it is relevant to the beneficiary, never to promote us” (Organization 6).

Summing up, the role of communication professionals in the majority of the organizations is an instrumental/technical one, related to the CSR implementation and reporting. The qualitative analysis was important to validate this conclusion: “the role of communication isn’t not only to publicize, but also to implement the CSR initiatives” (Organization 1); “communication department is responsible to publicize. (...) In terms of CSR project management communication is not involved. We have a specific CSR department” (Organization 4). As a respondent stated: “the CSR initiatives are a final product delivered to the communication department to disseminate them. There is no strategic role to communication” (Organization 7).

Ultimately, under the dimension number six, the future of CSR has been contemplated. Among the organizations under study, the CSR issue seems to be facing a moment of reorganization and reconstruction. On the one hand, there is a willingness to rethink the way of understanding and managing the CSR. The notion of “sustainability” tends to be used as an umbrella concept to make reference, not only to environmental, but also social and economic issues. On the other, there is a concern with the CSR evaluation and report, through sustainability reports.

The issue of certification processes emerged, not associated to the well-known ISO 26000<sup>3</sup>, but particularly to the recent family and work conciliation certification. As said

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.sgs.pt/pt-pt/sustainability/social-sustainability/audit-certification-and-verification/>

before, the work-life balance was pointed out as an important issue in terms of CSR and organizations are investing in processes to recognize it. The private sector in Portugal seems to be incentivized by a Governmental initiative – “Three in line Program” aiming to increase the balance between professional, personal and family life.

The environmental issues emerged as one priority to the organizations. It is unquestionable that the world is facing huge challenges due to the climate changes and organizations want to contribute to minimize it. In this research we could also identify a commitment to the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals<sup>4</sup> and there is an intention among the organizations to link the CSR objectives with the 17 global aims.

If in the beginning the CSR efforts have been seen as a way to externally improve organizations reputation, nowadays it's understood as something that must be authentic. As stated by the interviewees:

today, there is a clear notion that CSR needs to be something internal and external. For credibility reasons, doesn't make sense to invest in the community and not be interested to invest in the employees. (...) Needs to be something coherent. Isn't worth to have external CSR if you don't have internal CSR. (Organization 4)

At last, the CSR is becoming a “shared issue” among different departments. It is a concern to all organizations under study, but the desire to create an independent CSR department was not found.

## CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

One of the greatest disappointments was to realize the lack of interest and availability of the organizations to participate in this study that by principle should have been of their interest as members of Grace. In the association we found organizations belonging to different sectors of activity and there seems to be great differences from those that work in the industrial sector as they have, due to governmental constraints more structured approaches to all the security and environmental issues. The same can be said about all those that belong to multinational corporations that have to conform with international CSR programs. The main data gathered at the quantitative phase showed that the social (philanthropic) area emerged as the most relevant one in all the organizations, what was largely confirmed during the qualitative phase where researchers were able to understand that the idea of CSR/CC is often understood in a mere instrumental sense (Morsing, 2017) and more or less as equivalent to voluntary work. The qualitative approach enabled researchers to confirm these data and to understand better the motives that congregated the organizations in the association. The key element that seems to aggregate all these organizations in the realm of Grace is the enterprise

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iso-26000-performance-assessment-social-responsibility

<sup>4</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.ods.pt>

volunteering programs promoted by the Association what we must say was also quite an unexpected result.

Moreover, it was also quite a surprise to realize that the concept of “corporate citizenship” does not have any expression in the Portuguese organizations interviewed even in those that belong to an association that entitles itself as promoting the reflection about CC. It was also possible to conclude that all the issues that dealt in a more intimate way with employees policies, as for instance those that tend to be categorized under the tag “work-life balance”, seem to be giving their first steps. In certain areas where employees tend to have less qualifications and salaries that are in accordance with the values of the national minimum wage the questions concerning CSR as expressed by the organizations tend to be mixed up with issues that some authors may consider as employees’ benefits.

Maybe the most unexpected element that the researchers found concerns the number of non for profit organizations that belong to Grace and especially the fact that some of those organizations are foundations that belong to major national and international corporations. Some questions emerge when confronted to this specific issue: are the market still influenced by Friedman (1970) and dealing with CSR as preconized by the Nobel prize? The purpose of enterprise is profit and if the shareholders are socially motivated, they can devote their money and time to charities as for Friedman, as curiously enough as for so many of the left-wing politicians, social responsibility belongs to the governmental sphere (Moon, 2014). No one is here defending that enterprises should substitute the state, the social state is a key element in the construction of our European identity and as Kott (2017) says is understood by the others as an important element of our attractiveness.

Corporate messages are one among many voices that take part nowadays in the conversations about the companies CSR/CC (Rasche, Morsing & Moon, 2017) so it seems a bit dated some of the concerns of the organizations with the fact that to communicate some of their worries or challenges concerning the employees or the environment might be a problem for their reputations, that is, for their good name. Maybe no one has managed to summarize in a better way this dilemma as Verhezen (2015) when he entitled his book as *The vulnerability of corporate reputation*. But if it is true that the reputation is an ongoing process it is also true that organizations that tend to be expressive, to use the Wittgensteinian expression, and not only descriptive of their practices are much better understood by their stakeholders. Schultz and Hatch (2000) have put it quite clear when they highlighted the fact that reputation is built on the basis of how well all the constituencies of an organization buy into its overall meaning. Unfortunately, this does not seem to be the understanding the interviewed organizations have in general of the role of the communication or PR practitioners. The main point of view found in this research tends to coincide with a vision labelled by Morsing (2017) as merely instrumental (inform the relevant stakeholders about the corporate CSR activities, in quite a very market oriented perspective) when referring to different forms of expressing the social and environmental worries of the enterprises. Communication is seen merely as report

function and quite useful to follow the global reporting indicators guidelines<sup>5</sup> and publish a report on CSR or, using, in the words of Herzig and Kuhn (2017), a “plethora” of other labels for non-financial reports. Morsing (2017) considers two other phases, the political and the network one. These second and third phases are precisely the ones that might be considered within a vision of corporate citizenship.

Corporate citizenship not in a heavy and strict philosophical sense but understood as an active element in a much more society-centric perspective were the organization is understood as a partner in order to find the best solutions to global and globalized problems. We are thinking about corporation’s participation in partnerships as well as assuming certain engagements that might be seen as political especially in societies with non-democratic governments. It might also be important to note that nowadays organizations do not control the implications of all their actions or how their actions (communication included) will be understood by multiple stakeholders in different regions. It seems quite easy for the organizations interviewed to assume their social role, to see themselves as social actors the question of seeing themselves as political actors was vehemently denied all over the interviews. Only one of the interviewees assumed their role in shaping policies for better working conditions or as a pioneer in working for a better work-life balance. It seems that Moon’s (2014) statement that “there’s an elephant in the CSR room: the political role of corporations is usually excluded from their own accounts of CSR” (p. 133) is quite relevant in the case of the results found. It may be noted the number of corporations that have already engaged in different political activist actions since the boycotts to apartheid in South Africa or the more recent cases of organizations that petitioned the governor of Arizona to veto an anti-gay law (Moon, 2014).

What seems to be a tendency is clearly the relevance of the concept of sustainability understood as “sustainable development” as it has already been asserted by different authors (Broom & Sha, 2013; Morsing, 2017). If ten years ago the concept was understood still in an environmental vein nowadays it tends to be aligned with the 1987 Brundtland report as “development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”<sup>6</sup>. We could even speculate that this might be a concept to gain space in detriment of the corporate social responsibility one in the next few years according to the 27 interviews conducted all along this study.

What clearly seems to be lacking is the capacity to monitor, evaluate and communicate the impacts of the companies. It was quite common to realize that the interviewed organizations tend to evaluate the outputs in the form of finance or employee time but almost none had clearly knowledge about how their policies and activities really improved the lives of the employees, or reduced poverty or enhanced the well-being of the consumers.

From a theoretical point of view one of the most relevant aspects highlighted in this research for the PR professionals is the need for a better understanding of the total

<sup>5</sup> See <https://www.globalreporting.org/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <https://apambiente.pt/index.php?ref=16&subref=140>

quality management (TQM) paradigm. A more comprehensive approach to the questions of the connection between what in the literature is known as the CSR paradigm and the total quality management one is needed (Frolova & Lapina, 2014). With greater relevance in the industrial sector these two areas had been seen as quite different. In this new framework, and due to the lack of a constitutive approach to the concept of communication, we fear that the role of PR professionals tends to be reduced to mere report questions.

If it is true that while doing these kind of research and especially generally in the realm of the qualitative research, no statistical generalization is possible and that is not even the main intent, it is possible to speculate as Maxwell has so well put it, that there is no obvious reason *not* to believe that the results apply more generally (Maxwell, 2013).

Translation: Mafalda Eiró-Gomes and Ana Raposo

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## **SPANISH LOBBIES LISTED IN THE EUROPEAN TRANSPARENCY REGISTER**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Lobbyists are political agents of great importance, since they operate with the objective of influencing the decision making of different institutions. In order to improve knowledge about these pressure groups, the present research analyses the composition and functioning of the 745 Spanish lobbies that are, until the date of the study, registered in the Transparency Register of the European Union. Through a content analysis, we tried to show the relevance and influence that these groups have on the European Parliament's political decision-makers. The results showed that the category formed by the pressure groups of the companies of the commercial, business or professional associations is the most numerous, assuming 50,6% of the studied sample. Regarding the individuals who run these groups, it was noted that they are mostly men, in a proportion that corresponds to twice the number of women who perform this function. On the other hand, it is observed that only 8,18% of Spanish lobbies have their headquarters in Belgium, compared to 91,81% who are not domiciled in the place where the main administrative headquarters of the European Union is located. This indicates that the lobbying activity of Spanish groups is still low.

### **KEYWORDS**

political communication; public relations; lobbies; pressure groups

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## **LÓBIS ESPANHÓIS NO REGISTO EUROPEU DE TRANSPARÊNCIA**

### **RESUMO**

Os lobistas são agentes políticos de grande importância, já que operam com o objetivo de influenciar a tomada de decisão de diferentes instituições. Visando melhorar o conhecimento sobre estes grupos de pressão, a presente investigação analisa a composição e o funcionamento dos 745 lóbis espanhóis que se encontram, até à data do estudo, inscritos no Registo de Transparência da União Europeia. Através de uma análise de conteúdo, procurou-se mostrar a relevância e a influência que estes grupos detêm sobre os decisores políticos do Parlamento Europeu. Os resultados mostraram que a categoria formada pelos grupos de pressão das empresas das associações comerciais, empresariais ou profissionais é a mais numerosa, assumindo 50,6% da amostra estudada. Em relação aos indivíduos que dirigem estes grupos, notou-se que são maioritariamente homens, numa proporção que corresponde ao dobro do número de mulheres que desempenham esta função. Por outro lado, observa-se que apenas 8,18% dos lóbis espanhóis dispõem de sede na Bélgica, em comparação com 91,81% que não estão domiciliados no lugar

onde se encontra a principal sede administrativa da União Europeia. Tal indica que a atividade de *lobbying* dos grupos espanhóis ainda é reduzida.

#### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

comunicação política; relações públicas; lóbis; grupos de pressão

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

Lobbies play an important role within the political process (Bentley, 1908; Berry, 1989), as well as in their relations with public authorities, through planned communication strategies (Almiron & Xifra, 2016; Castillo-Esparcia, 2018).

This study showed that the level of presence of Spanish pressure groups depends on the type of organization (consultancies, professional and employer associations, companies, non-governmental organizations, religious communities, academic or research institutions and local or regional authorities). In addition, it also evaluated the knowledge Spaniards have in relation to the national implications of European policies, as well as the effort invested in influencing these policies, by analysing the human resources invested and the available budget.

In the European Union, it is useful to maintain good relations with political agents in order to know and influence decision-making so that they are closer to the needs of countries. This two-way communicative process contributes to the improvement of informational and participatory flows and facilitates the realization of citizens right to participation in the political process, through associations that represent them (lobbies).

In this investigation, we sought to know the degree of presence of Spanish pressure groups in the European Union through the analysis of their official registration. This register lists the organizations that wish to know and participate in European policies and in its different norms, directives, regulations, dictates, among others. European decisions have a major influence on regulatory frameworks in national policies.

Thus, having the possibility to know the European dynamics and to interfere in the construction of policies, as well as to intervene in the norms that are being created is important. This participation in the European decision-making process allows lobbyists to propose improvements in decisions so that they meet the social reality of each country. In addition, lobbies can propose new regulations by raising awareness and educating participants in the regulatory process (European Commission and European Parliament).

#### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The establishment and maintenance of relations with political powers through lobbying (Castillo-Esparcia, Smolak-Lozano & Fernández Souto, 2017; Xifra, 1998) is one of

the relevant functions of public relations. Thus, one of the most important audiences for organizations is the political powers and there are, therefore, numerous professions that practice lobbying. In Spain, the term lobbyist is not commonly used since it has negative connotations. In this sense, it is preferred to use the term “institutional relations”.

The articulation of social requests towards power is the cornerstone of democracy, pluralism and citizen participation (Arévalo Martínez & Herlinda Ortiz, 2018; Castillo-Esparcia, 2011; Chalmers, 2013; Harris & McGrath, 2012; Svolik, 2012). This articulation of the interests of the different social agents was also studied by Cabral, Andrelo and Granato (2018), by Canelón (2005), by Castillo-Esparcia, Guerra-Heredia and Almansa-Martínez (2017), by Klüver (2012), by Rebollo-Bueno (2019) and by Schendelen (2010). Barron (2011), for example, introduced cultural differences as a determining factor in the role played by the different political agents involved in decision-making.

In the specific case of Europe, the contributions of Bernhagen, Dür and Marshall (2015) stand out. Studies on the European Union’s regulatory role in national aspects focus on legal, political and social elements, with citizens being the last recipients of decisions by European institutions. European and national regulations themselves highlight the predominance of European decisions over national regulatory contexts.

As a result of the increasing influence of European agreements in the activities of member states, national social requests cannot be transmitted only through the European Councils, but also through the participation of society in the normative process. The participation of pressure groups in the European Union is, therefore, an idea developed since the 90s. With the creation of the Transparency Register, lobbies have an active voice in the process of approach, discussion, elaboration and implementation of public policies. This participation can be conveyed in an active, reactive or proactive way, but it describes social organizations as agents of European public policies through their participation.

Regulations through norms “tend to modify certain social conducts and practices that have repercussions both on institutions (...) and on individuals” (Moya Díaz, 2018, p. 88). Thus, “it is important to discuss the relationships established between formality and informality, the role that institutions play as mediators of social action and the effect of modernizing processes on governments” (Moya Díaz, 2018, p. 89).

It is true that the regulation of lobbying has been a constant almost everywhere in the world. In the United States, the country with the highest concentration of lobbyists, in 1938 the FARA (Foreign Agents Registration Act) was passed, which required the registration of agents representing the interests of other countries.

This interest contrasts with the fact that, in the scope of public relations, lobbying activity was not particularly important, since they were more focused on media relations (Almansa-Martínez, 2003). However, the theoretical and practical development of this theme, showed that the media role is not an end, but an instrument for the dissemination of planned actions and messages. In this sense, the study of lobbying as a communicative process has references influenced by public relations (Castillo-Esparcia, 2018;

Xifra, 2016). In the international context, the analysis of the management of political influence has ample baggage and an undeniable Anglo-Saxon contribution (Bentley, 1908; Milbraith, 1963; Truman, 1968).

Lobbies have an increasing participation in the political process due to two fundamental factors:

1. citizens and organizations are aware that they must participate in the public or political discussion of the social issues that affect them and for that, they must have political channels for this purpose. In the traditional political model, the main vehicle is political parties, but social complexity requires a greater realization of interests through social associations. This transfer of social interests can be partial (demand for specific requests from groups, such as improvements in assistance, wages or conditions) or transversal (defence of the environment, consumer rights, among others). It is a sector characterized by the socialization of the State (Castillo-Esparcia & Smolak, 2017);
2. the growing social problems of contemporary societies require greater participation by public institutions in the management of affairs. Thus, Harris (2002) states that the State increasingly participates in the regulation of collective requests in the context of social nationalization.

## METHODOLOGY

The present investigation has as main objective to know and to analyse the composition and the activity of the Spanish pressure groups present in the Transparency Register of the European Union. For this, content analysis models were developed with the following variables:

1. date of registration: this information was obtained with the objective of determining the sectors or pressure groups that first registered and that adapted to the transparency policies;
2. lobbies with headquarters in Brussels, Belgium: this variable made it possible to determine which are pressure groups based in the city where the main administrative headquarters of the European Union is located; these groups show better relations with the decision-makers of the European Parliament and, therefore, have a more intense activity;
3. data of the individuals who make up the lobbies in order to know their profiles and their composition: name, sex, position held by the person representing the groups, total number of people who make up the groups, average number of individuals working for these groups, how many of those work full-time, as well as the indication of the groups that have the largest number of people in their staff;
4. objectives pursued by the lobbies;
5. information on annual costs, to learn about the lobbies, as well as the sectors that allocate more economic resources to the activity;
6. the areas of greater interest to registered pressure groups.

It is possible to access the *corpus* of study of this investigation through the public website made available by the Transparency Register of the European Union<sup>1</sup>. It is a database in which, on a voluntary basis and exactly as described on the Registry's own website, are listed "organisations that try to influence the law-making and policy implementation process of the EU institutions"<sup>2</sup>. This register describes the interests of pressure

<sup>1</sup> See <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do?redir=false&locale=es>

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://ec.europa.eu/transparencyregister/public/homePage.do?redir=false&locale=es>



groups, states who represents those interests, on whose behalf, as well as the budget that each group has. In this way, the register contributes to public control, providing citizens and other lobbies with the opportunity to monitor the activities of each pressure group.

The sample studied is composed of 745 Spanish pressure groups that, until the date of the study, were registered in the EU Transparency Register. The analysis was carried out between February and March 2018.

## RESULTS

Table 1 shows the 745 Spanish interest groups registered in the EU Transparency Register up to the date of the study, ordered according to the organization's category and subcategory, indicating the number of lobbies for each. The most numerous category is that of "pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations" with 337 registered lobbies, within which stands out the subcategory "trade and business associations" which brings together 170 groups. The minority group is that of religious organizations, where only one pressure group is registered.

ORGANISATION CATEGORY LISTED IN THE EU REGISTER	ORGANISATION SUB-CATEGORY LISTED IN THE EU REGISTER	NUMBER OF ENTITIES
Professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants	Professional consultants	52
	Law firms	8
	Self-employed consultants	13
	<b>Total</b>	<b>73</b>
Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations	Companies and groups	115
	Trading and corporate associations	170
	Trade unions and professional associations	57
	Other entities	35
	<b>Total</b>	<b>377</b>
Non-governmental organisations	Organisations, platforms and non-governmental networks and akin	167
	<b>Total</b>	<b>167</b>
Reflection groups, academic and research institutions	Reflection groups and research institutions	46
	Academic institutions	26
	<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>
Organisations representing churches and religious communities	<b>Total</b>	<b>1</b>
Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.	Regional structures	12
	Other non-national public authorities (lower levels)	5
	Transnational associations and networks, representing public regional or non-national authorities	7
	Other public or mixed entities, created by Law, to act in support of public interests	31
	<b>Total</b>	<b>55</b>
	<b>Total of groups: 745</b>	

Table 1: Organisation categories and number of Spanish entities listed in the EU Transparency Register

**DATA COLLECTED OF THE REGISTRATION DAY FOR EVERY SPANISH GROUP OF INTEREST LISTED IN THE EU TRANSPARENCY REGISTER**

The EU Transparency Register started on 23 June 2008, and the first 10 Spanish groups of interest to be listed were the following shown in Table 2.

ENTRY DATE	ORGANIZATION NAME
23/06/2008	Telefónica, S.A.
24/06/2008	Eurosenior
04/07/2008	Cooperativas Agro-alimentarias de España
16/10/2008	Asociación Multisectorial de la Información (Asedie)
07/11/2008	Plataforma de ONG de Acción Social (POAS)
21/11/2008	Confederación Española de Transporte de Mercancías (CETM)
27/01/2009	Puerto de Celeiro S.A.
25/02/2009	European Federation of Rural Tourism (Eurogites)
30/04/2009	Cámara Oficial de Comercio, Industria, Servicios y de Barcelona (COCIN BCN)
08/05/2009	Confederación Española de Cajas de Ahorros (CECA)

Table 2: Entry date for the pressure groups listed in the EU Transparency Register

The subcategories of the pressure groups that entered the register first and that, therefore, adapted earlier to the transparency policies are shown in Table 3. To determine this order, we considered the elapsed time (three months) from the beginning of the registration until the formalization of the registration, calculating the average for each subcategory.

The first subcategory of organization to register was the “other organizations”, integrated in the “pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations”, with an average of 63 months until registration. Next is the group “organizations that represent local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed bodies, etc.”, with the subcategories “other non-national public authorities (lower levels)” that registered in 69 months and the “regional structures” that took 74 months. Fourth, there is the group of organizations formed by the “trade unions and professional associations”, integrated in the “pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations” with an average enrolment time of 76 months.

<b>RANKING</b>	<b>INTEREST GROUPS (SUBCATEGORIES)</b>	<b>AVERAGE TIME (IN MONTHS) UNTIL REGISTRATION IS COMPLETED, FOR EACH SECTOR</b>	<b>CATEGORY</b>
1	Other organisations	63,37	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
2	Other non-national public authorities (lower levels)	69,8	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
3	Regional structures	74,91	Organisations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
4	Trade unions and professional associations	76,77	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
5	Law firms	79,12	Professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants
6	Trading and corporate associations	79,74	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
7	Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks, or akin	81,81	Non-governmental organisations, professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants
8	Professional consultants	83,17	
9	Reflection and research institutions	85,89	Reflection groups, academic and research institutions
10	Companies and groups	86,77	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations

11	Other public or mixed entities, created by law, to act in support of public interests	88,19	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
12	Self-employed consultants	88,53	Professional consultants, law firms and self-employed consultants
13	Academic institutions	94,84	Reflection groups, academic and research institutions
14	Transnational associations and networks representing regional public authorities or at an inferior administrative level	98	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
15	Organisations representing churches or religious communities	104	Organisations representing churches and religious communities

Table 3: First sectors listed in the EU Transparency Register

### DATA ON SPANISH PRESSURE GROUPS BASED IN BELGIUM

Of the 745 Spanish pressure groups that, until the date of the study, were registered in the EU Transparency Register, only 61 are based in Brussels, Belgium. Thus, only 8,18% of these lobbies have their headquarters in Brussels, compared to 91,81% of the groups that are not established in the place where the main administrative headquarters of the European Union is located. The sub-category “companies and groups” is the one with the largest number of lobbyists with an address in Belgium, accounting for 21,31%, followed by “organizations, platforms and non-governmental networks and the like” with 18,03%, third in this count are the “commercial and business associations” with 14,75%.

Of the addresses presented in the register, 18 of them are coincident, which means that the offices of these groups share the same building. Between these organizations 38,8% are “professional consultants” and 22,22% refer to “commercial and business associations”.

### DATA RELATED TO INDIVIDUALS OPERATING IN PRESSURE GROUPS

The total number of people working in the Spanish pressure groups in the Register is 3.851. Of those, 1.806 work in those groups continuously. Thus, the average number of employees in each group is five people.

The pressure group with the largest number of employees (165) is Fundación Tekniker. This foundation fits into the “think tanks, academic and research institutions”, more specifically in the “think tanks and research institutions” subcategory. Then there is the Fundación Secretariado Gitano with 124 employees, which belongs to the “non-governmental organizations”. In third place is the Universidad de Alicante with 88 lobbyists, integrated in the “reflection groups, academic and research institutions”.

Considering the sex of the individuals who represent the lobbies and who are responsible for maintaining the dialogue with the European Union, men (509) are twice as many as women (236), with percentages of 68,32% and 31, 67% respectively. This pattern is repeated in all the pressure groups studied.

Analysing the positions performed, we distinguish positions that are held by individuals who have the highest management and directional authority in the administration of the group, as well as other managerial positions. The following terms are those that describe the highest authority positions: president, executive director, general director, manager, executive, delegate, chief, executive, executive president, principal officer, advisor and CEO. There were 305 people in charge of mediating relations with the European Union, and 440 individuals with other functions. This presupposes that 40,93% are directors of maximum authority and that 59,06% occupy other positions. This situation occurs in all pressure groups, being a little more egalitarian in the case of non-governmental organizations, in which 83 of the positions are leaders and 84 perform other functions.

#### **OBJECTIVES PURSUED BY LOBBIES LISTED IN THE EU REGISTER**

With the analysis carried out, few of the groups studied claim to have a specific mission and objectives related to the change of legislation, or that were constituted due to some specific and concrete fact.

The specific objectives found were the following:

- pressure group “organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.”/“regional structures”:
  - Agència Catalana de l'Aigua: to draft laws and decree-laws in the field of water;
- pressure group “organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.”/“other non-national public authorities (inferior administrative level)”:
  - Ayuntamiento de Barcelona: local entity in charge of local legislation;
  - Ayuntamiento de Huelva: local entity in charge of local legislation;
- pressure group “NGO”:
  - Access Info Europe: its mission is to ensure that the right of access to information is enshrined in law and applied in practice. This includes the right of access to European Union documents as established by Article 15 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union;
  - European Agroforestry Federation: the main objective of the organization is achieved through policy recommendations from the states of the European Union and the Common Agrarian Policy (CAP);

- Asociación Afectados del Vuelo Jk5022: its main objectives are to clarify what happened after the accident and to provide support to victims;
- Alianza de Solidaridad Extremeña: the aim of this group is to get 0,7% of GDP to go to aid and cooperation with poor countries;
- Women of the World Platform: its aim is to try to enact laws or guidelines that do not ignore, reverse or undermine the identity of women, the dignity and values of mothers or the priority of family dedication.

#### **DATA ON THE PARTICIPATION OF SPANISH PRESSURE GROUPS IN INTERGROUPS, INDUSTRIAL FORUMS AND EXPERT GROUPS**

Participation of Spanish interest groups in intergroups is only 2,95%, and the same figure (2,95%) shows for forums. Participation in expert groups is higher, with 9,79%.

These interest groups participate in the following intergroups: Intergroup on Sport, Climate Change, Biodiversity and Sustainable Development and those related to fishing. In the industrial forums, these are the European Energy Forum and the EUROPECHE.

Lastly, Spanish interest groups are present in the following expert groups:

- Comité consultatif pour la sécurité et la santé sur le lieu de travail;
- Commission expert group Civil Society Forum on Drugs;
- Commission operational expert group of the European Innovation Partnership on Raw Materials;
- Digital Transport and Logistics Forum;
- Corporate Bond Market Liquidity;
- EU Bioeconomy Stakeholders Panel;
- European Sustainable Shipping Forum;
- Noise Expert Group;
- Payment Systems Market Expert Group;
- Rural Network's Assembly;
- Skills development and careers in the blue economy;
- Standing Committee on Precursors;
- Steel Advisory Group;
- Structured Dialogue with European Structural and Investment Funds' partners group of experts.

#### **INFORMATION ON ANNUAL BUDGET OF GROUPS TO LEARN ABOUT THE LOBBIES AND SECTORS WITH THE LARGEST BUDGETS**

Table 4 shows the 10 interest groups with the highest annual budget.

	ENTRY DATE	NAME OF THE ORGANISATION	SUB-CATEGORY	ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE (ABSOLUTE AMOUNT)	ESTIMATED EXPENDITURE (INTERVALS)	AVERAGE EXPENDITURE/ EXACT
1	2012/03/01	Fundación Internacional y para Iberoamérica de Administración y Políticas Públicas (FIIAPP)	Other public or mixed entities, created by Law, to act in support of public interests	€34.777.770		€34.777.770
2	2012/01/24	Fundación Tekniker (IK4 - Tekniker)	Reflection groups and research institutions		€5.500.000 -€5.749.000	€5.624.500
3	2016/11/09	Institut d'Investigación en Ciències de la Salut Germans Trias i Pujol (IGTP)	Academic Institutions	€2.943.000		€2.943.000
4	2016/10/17	Instituto Nacional de Investigación y Tecnología Agraria y Alimentaria (INIA)	Other reflection and research institutions		€2.750.000 -€2.999.999	€2.874.999,50
5	2016/05/31	Centro Tecnológico del Mar – Fundación Cetmar (Cetmar)	Other public or mixed entities, created by Law, to act in support of public interests		€2.750.000 -€2.999.999	€2.874.999,50
6	2017/04/10	Organización Interprofesional Agroalimentaria del Porcino de Capa Blanca (Interporc)	Trade and corporate associations		€2.500.000 -€2.749.000	€2.624.500
7	2016/11/02	Idiada Automotive Technology, S.A (Idiada)	Companies and groups		€2.500.000 -€2.749.000	€2.624.500
8	2008/06/23	Telefónica, S.A.	Companies and groups	€2.000.000		€2.000.000
9	2018/02/08	Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona)	Other public non-national public authorities (local or regional)		€1.000.000 -€1.249.999	€1.124.999,50
10	2017/07/06	Comisión Nacional de los Mercados y de la Competencia (CNMC)	Other public or mixed entities, created by Law, to act in support of public interests		€1.000.000 -€1.249.999	€1.124.999,50

Table 4: Pressure groups registered with the largest budgets

Considering the categories of pressure groups and their average spending, a ranking of the lobbies that have the largest budgets for their activity was established.

First in the ranking are “organizations that represent local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed bodies, etc.” and within these, “other public or mixed bodies, created by law, whose objective is to act in the public interest” with an average expenditure of €1.391.057,43. This is followed by “associations and transnational networks of regional public authorities of a lower category than the national” with an average expenditure of €326.428. Finally, there are the “other public authorities of a lower category than the national” with an average expenditure of €257.999.

In second place is the category of “reflection groups, academic and research institutions”, being the “reflection groups and research institutions” that stand out the most, with € 196.547 spent. “Academic institutions” have an average expenditure of €179.588,56 and “professional consultancies, law firms and self-employed consultants” have a similar expenditure. In this last subcategory, “professional consultants” have an average expenditure of €196.320.

Thirdly, “pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations” appear, with emphasis on “companies and groups”, whose average expenditure is € 173.861,91 and for “unions and professional associations” with €132.610 spent.

#### **MOST ATTRACTIVE AREAS OF INTEREST AMONG THE PRESSURE GROUPS LISTED IN THE REGISTER**

The areas of greatest interest in lobbies are shown in Table 5.

	<b>AREAS OF INTEREST FOR LISTED INTEREST GROUPS</b>	<b>RELEVANCE IN %</b>
1	Environmental issues: 446 groups interested	59,86%
2	Research and technology: 403 groups interested	54,09%
3	Energy: 312 groups interested	41,87%
4	Corporate: 311 groups interested	41,74%
5	Climate change: 292 groups interested	39,19%
6	Competency: 274 groups interested	38,77%
7	Trade: 259 groups interested	37,56%
8	Domestic markets: 263 groups interested	35,30%
9	Information society: 262 groups interested	35,16%
10	Education: 257 groups interested	34,49%
11	Business and finance: 252 groups interested	33,82%
12	Consumers: 252 groups interested	33,82%
13	Employment and social affairs: 252 groups interested	33,82%
14	Food safety: 246 groups interested	33,02%
15	Agriculture and rural development: 235 groups interested	31,54%
16	Transports: 223 groups interested	29,93%
17	Regional policy: 218 groups interested	29,26%
18	Trans-european networks: 210 groups interested	28,18%



19	Development: 209 groups interested	28,05%
20	Public health: 209 groups interested	28,05%
21	External affairs: 205 groups interested	27,51%
22	General and institutional affairs: 198 groups interested	26,57%
23	Taxes: 193 groups interested	25,90%
24	Fishing and aquaculture: 178 groups interested	23,89%
25	Justice and fundamental rights: 170 groups interested	22,81%
26	Culture: 155 groups interested	20,80%
27	Youth: 152 groups interested	20,40%
28	External affairs and security: 147 groups interested	19,73%
29	Communication: 141 groups interested	18,92%
30	Audiovisual and media: 133 groups interested	17,85%
31	Customs: 126 groups interested	16,91%
32	Budget: 122 groups interested	16,37%
33	Humanitarian assistance: 101 groups interested	13,55%
34	Domestic affairs: 96 groups interested	12,88%
35	Financial stability, financial services and capital markets union: 83 groups interested	11,14%
36	Extension: 66 groups interested	8,85%
37	Sports: 63 groups interested	8,45%

Table 5: Areas of interest for listed pressure groups

The following (Table 6) shows, in decreasing order and divided by categories, the pressure groups that are interested in a greater number of topics. It appears that the “academic institutions”, the “other non-national public authorities (lower admin rank)”, the “professional consultancies”, the “consultants who work on their own” and the “reflection groups and research institutions” are the lobbies concerned with a greater number of subjects.

RANKING	INTEREST GROUPS (SUBCATEGORIES)	AVERAGE NUMBER OF AREAS OF INTEREST FOR EACH GROUP	CATEGORY
1	Academic institutions	18,9	Reflection groups, academic and research institutions
2	Other non-national public authorities (lower admin rank)	18	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
3	Professional consultants	14,94	Professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants
4	Self-employed consultants	11,61	Professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants
5	Reflection groups and research associations	10,71	Reflection groups, academic and research institutions

6	Trading and corporate associations	10,5	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
7	Other public or mixed entities created by law to act in support of public interest	10,03	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
8	Trade unions and professional associations	9,66	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
9	Non-governmental organisations, platforms and networks and akin	9,5	Non-governmental organisations
10	Companies and groups	9,43	Pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations
11	Transnational associations and networks representing regional public authorities or non-national ones	9	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
12	Lawyers' office	8,37	Professional consultants, law firms and external self-employed consultants
13	Other entities	7,2	Companies and trading, corporate or professional associations interest groups
14	Regional structures	6,58	Organisations representing local, regional or municipal authorities, other public or mixed entities, etc.
15	Organisations representing churches and religious communities	4	Organisations representing churches and religious communities

Table 6: Most attractive areas of interest for the listed groups

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The group constituted by “pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professional associations” is the one that has the greatest representation in the European Union’s Transparency Register, with the aim of influencing the legislative process and the application of public policies of the institutions of the European Union.

As mentioned earlier, registration in the Transparency Register is voluntary, so the pressure groups’ registration date reveals its interest in adapting to transparency policies. In addition, registration presupposes the possibility of access to meetings related to the preparation and application of public policies in the European Union. Without that registration, it is not possible to have any influence regarding European legislation and its implementation. In this way, the information related to registration says which organizations are most willing to promote their interests in front of public authorities. With the results obtained, it is possible to determine that of the first ten Spanish lobbies registered in the European Union’s Transparency Register, eight belong to the subcategory of “other groups”, which is integrated in the “pressure groups within companies and commercial, business or professionals”.

In relation to the location of Spanish lobbyists, few were found to have an address in Brussels. The pressure groups that have offices in this capital and that, therefore, have a closer relationship with the European Parliament's policy makers, are those that belong to the category of "companies and groups".

The study of people who work in pressure groups in the European Union shows that about half (46,9%) do it on a full-time basis and the remaining employees work part-time. As for the individuals responsible for representing the groups before the European Union, it was concluded that the number of men is twice the number of women.

From the results obtained, it was also observed that only a small number of pressure groups pursue specific objectives related to the change in legislation or, on the other hand, that have been constituted due to a specific fact.

With reference to data on the participation of Spanish pressure groups in inter-groups, industrial forums and expert groups, it is possible to see that this participation is still very low. These forums and groups serve to give lobbies a voice, which means that their intention to achieve involvement in the European Union's sphere of influence and decision-making structures is still scarce.

Further on, based on the analysis of economic data, it is easy to verify that the category "organizations representing local, regional and municipal authorities, other public or mixed bodies, etc." is the one that allocates more economic resources to lobbying.

Finally, based on the observation of areas of greatest interest to pressure groups, it is possible to determine that the environment, research and technology, energy and corporate, are the subjects on which they will be most committed when pressing policy makers.

Translation: Ana Almansa-Martínez and Elizabet Castellero-Ostio

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS AND CAMPAIGNS ABOUT ROAD SAFETY AND DRUG USE: EFFICACY ASSESSMENT OF CAMPAIGNS IN AUDIOVISUAL MEDIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This investigation measures the effectiveness of media relations in campaigns on road safety and drugs. Spain is among the European countries with the highest rates of road accidents due to drug use (Instituto Nacional de Toxicología y Ciencias Forenses, 2017) and, as a result, several organizations carry out prevention campaigns. Xifra (2011) links this type of social campaigns to public relations, since media relations (Wilcox, Cameron & Xifra, 2012) are fundamental to their effect, as they amplify messages (Castillo, 2009) and influence the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Previous studies on this subject did not focus on television and radio campaigns that address drug addiction and road safety, thus justifying this work. To carry out this investigation, a qualitative and quantitative methodology was used, which combined semi-structured interviews with leaders of organizations responsible for the creation of road safety campaigns (General Traffic Directorate, Foundation for Aid against Drug Addiction and Mapfre Foundation), with the purpose of measuring exposure to the message (Castillo & Álvarez, 2015), which includes the analysis of the coverage, economic impact and content of ten campaigns run between 2011 and 2015. The results showed that the campaigns aimed at knowledge, awareness and education, by betting on combined strategies. For this, they used mass media, in particular television. Education, deterrence and health predominated in the frameworks of the campaigns, which favoured cannabis and alcohol as dangerous substances. Regarding the media coverage of these announcements, 375 pieces of information were disseminated in four months. From the analysis of its content, the predominance of informative messages (93%), its broadcasting in news (56,2% on television and 50,6% on radio) and the news in terms of events can be highlighted. The most treated substance is alcohol (90%). Despite the interviews evidencing the use of mass media, in particular television, the low coverage and the low continuity does not make the topic present in the media or public agenda. In addition, the framework and thematization that were generated did not meet the objectives desired by the organizations that created the campaigns.

### **KEYWORDS**

public relations; media; drug use; road safety; agenda-setting

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# RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS E CAMPANHAS SOBRE SEGURANÇA RODOVIÁRIA E CONSUMO DE DROGAS: AVALIAÇÃO DA EFICÁCIA EM MEIOS AUDIOVISUAIS

## RESUMO

Esta investigação mede a eficácia das relações com os média em campanhas sobre segurança rodoviária e drogas. Espanha consta entre os países europeus com maior sinistralidade rodoviária por consumo de drogas (Instituto Nacional de Toxicología y Ciencias Forenses, 2017) e, em consequência, diversas organizações realizam campanhas de prevenção. Xifra (2011) vincula este tipo de campanhas sociais às relações públicas, já que as relações com os média (Wilcox, Cameron & Xifra, 2012) são fundamentais para o seu efeito, na medida em que amplificam as mensagens (Castillo, 2009) e influenciam a agenda pública (McCombs & Shaw, 1972). Os estudos anteriores sobre este assunto não se debruçaram sobre as campanhas de televisão e de rádio que abordam a toxicodependência e a segurança rodoviária, justificando-se, assim, este trabalho. Para realizar esta investigação utilizou-se uma metodologia de carácter qualitativo e quantitativo que combinou as entrevistas semiestruturadas com líderes de organizações responsáveis pela criação de campanhas de segurança rodoviária (Direção Geral de Tráfego, Fundação de Ajuda contra a Dependência de Drogas e Fundação Mapfre) com o método de medição da exposição à mensagem (Castillo & Álvarez, 2015), o qual inclui a análise da cobertura, do impacto económico e do conteúdo de 10 campanhas veiculadas entre 2011 e 2015. Os resultados mostraram que as campanhas tiveram como objetivos o conhecimento, a consciencialização e a educação, mediante a aposta em estratégias combinadas. Para tal, utilizaram meios de comunicação de massa, em particular a televisão. A educação, a dissuasão e a saúde predominaram nos enquadramentos das campanhas, que privilegiaram a cannabis e o álcool como substâncias perigosas. No que respeita à cobertura mediática destes anúncios, registaram-se 375 informações difundidas em quatro meses. Da análise do seu conteúdo, pode destacar-se o domínio de mensagens informativas (93%), a sua veiculação em noticiários (56,2% na televisão e 50,6% na rádio) e a atualidade em matéria de acontecimentos. A substância mais tratada é o álcool (90%). Apesar das entrevistas evidenciarem a utilização de meios de massa, em particular a televisão, a baixa cobertura e a escassa continuidade não faz com que o tema esteja presente na agenda mediática ou pública. Além disso, o enquadramento e a tematização que se geraram não foram ao encontro dos objetivos desejados pelas organizações que criaram as campanhas.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

relações públicas; meios de comunicação; consumo de drogas; segurança rodoviária; *agenda-setting*

## INTRODUCTION

The present investigation focuses on the study of road prevention campaigns – in particular those that relate the consumption of addictive substances with road accidents – developed by the main public and private entities dedicated to road safety in Spain. More specifically, an attempt was made to evaluate the effectiveness of the public relations actions of these organizations, aimed at promoting the dissemination of the campaigns in mass media.

This work arises motivated by data that link the accident rate to the consumption of alcohol and drugs, which is responsible for almost one in two fatalities in traffic accidents (Instituto Nacional de Toxicología y Ciencias Forenses [INTCF], 2017). In addition,



Spain ranks first in Europe in drug use (Observatorio Europeo de las Drogas y las Toxicomanías, 2019) and, consequently, also takes first place in road accidents caused by addictive substances. Individuals between 18 and 29 are those with the highest levels of consumption, in particular alcohol and cannabis (Dirección General de Tráfico, 2016; Fundación Mapfre & FAD, 2018).

Nevertheless, and despite drug addiction being a major problem, Spanish society does not place this issue among the most worrying issues<sup>1</sup>. In view of this situation, several institutions have developed prevention programs where communication has proved to be an essential management area, favouring the means, dissemination and credibility of messages.

Television and radio are essential for the diffusion of social campaigns, as they are among the most consumed media by the target audience, in addition to reaching a wide range of the population and stimulating perception, memory and recollection (Bryant & Zillmann, 1996).

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Public relations is a fundamental factor in the management of organizations' communication, favouring dialogue and the creation of trusting relationships with the public.

In this regard, Xifra (2011) refers to social campaigns developed by public institutions as typical of public relations due to their strategic approach, which is based on the creation of media coverage and also on the use of advertising media. In fact, one of the functions of public relations is the management of effective relations with the media (Castillo, 2010; Wilcox, Cameron & Xifra, 2012).

Thus, relations with the media are inherent to the work of the public relations departments, so that they can consolidate themselves as sources of information.

## MASS MEDIA AND EFFECTS THEORIES

The evolution of the mass media, which began with the press, brought access to information and knowledge for the entire population. There followed the appearance of cinema (1892), radio (1900), television (1930) and the Internet (2000).

Today, despite the fact that society is immersed in a context of "infoxication", resulting from technological advances, television still occupies an essential place in people's lives and, therefore, in the dissemination of information to wider audiences. Its high penetration rate (Conecta, 2018), as well as the credibility it has when compared to less conventional means, makes it a good support for the transmission of messages (Edelman, 2018). In addition to this, the radio also plays a role in supporting the internalization of messages, because it facilitates their memorization and remembrance (Martín, 2000).

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/11\\_barometros/indicadores.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/11_barometros/indicadores.html)

Ros (2008) classifies the means that an institution has in: own, earned and paid. In this work, the interest in media coverage is particularly interesting, as a result of public relations management.

The mass media represent a very important audience in social campaigns due to their ability to amplify messages and influence the formation of opinions. Reviewing the scientific literature on the subject, Lang and Lang (1962) stated that the mass media build realities and have the function of transmitting information. The agenda-setting theory is based, precisely, on the influence that the media have on the public agenda (McCombs & Shaw, 1972), describing them as those responsible for directing citizens' attention to some themes (Agostini, 1984), therefore interfering in the institutional agenda. Thus described, the media agenda intervenes in the thematization of reality, insofar as the themes treated in the mass media become part of the collective imagination. The framing theory complements this idea and "emphasizes the power of the media to draw attention to certain issues and generate frameworks for the interpretation of social events" (D'Adamo, Garcia & Freidenberg, 2007, p. 121).

Furthermore, according to Gerbner and Gross's theory of cultivation (1976), the mass media (especially television) "form the social universe of their consumers from a systematic and prolonged exposure in time to repetitive and stable messages that will allow to maintain the dominant structures, values, beliefs and social orientations" (Macedo, 2017, p. 70).

#### **MEDIA, COMMUNICATION, DRUG USE PREVENTION AND ROAD SAFETY**

In the 1970s, Unesco recognized the importance of the media in mass communication in the prevention of drug addiction, due to their ability to transmit knowledge and to generate certain attitudes towards drug use. Megías (2010) and Becoña (2012) also discuss the importance of these means as essential agents in the prevention of drug use, as pointed out by Beneit, Garcia and Mayor (1997) or Cuesta, Menéndez and Ugarte (2011), these influence the knowledge that society has on a given topic, sensitizing it to maintain, increase or modify behaviours.

According to the study carried out by the IAB (2017), the public between the ages of 16 and 30 consumes mainly internet, television and radio. According to these data, González and Carrero (2008) highlight the benefits provided by audio-visual media to establish relationships with audiences, namely: their ability to transmit rational and emotional messages, the ability to create memory and recall, as well as the stimulus of perception.

The literature review on the object of study indicates a lack of studies that relate public relations strategies for preventing drug use with road safety. However, there are studies that separately discuss the topic of drug use and road safety.

Thus, research was found on the effects associated with drug use (Calafat, Adrover, Juan & Blay, 2008; Ramírez, 2017; Wakefield, Loken & Hornik, 2010), centered on communication campaigns that alert for the prevention of this consumption (Sola-Morais &

Quiroz, 2019). There are also works that analyse the published information on addictive substances (Vega, 1995). In this context, especially those that focus on the printed media (Congil et al., 2004) stand out. Miranda and Iglesias (2015), for example, start from the agenda-setting theory, while other studies focus on framing theory, realizing that the privileged frameworks for journalistic information relate to events/infractions related to drug use (Gaona & Martínez, 2009; Gómez & Martín, 2012; Paricio, Rodríguez & Núñez-Romero, 2012).

In addition, Martínez and Segura (2013), also stated that the treatment of information that the mass media give to the subject of drug use has changed. According to Fernández, Alameda and Martín (2011), communication on this topic has become more emotional and affective, seeking to respond to the needs for interaction with citizens (Castelló, 2014).

With regard to the analysis of drug use prevention campaigns broadcast by audiovisual media (which are of interest for this investigation), it was noticed that previous research focused on the presence of drug addiction on radio and television (Hernández, 2001; Martínez & Cubells, 2010).

In addition to the focus on drug use, the literature review also made it possible to find studies that addressed the relationship between road safety campaigns and the mass media. In this context, work focused on the institutions issuing prevention campaigns on road safety matters (Castelló, 2010; Castillo, Castro & Pedregal, 2011; Gaona & Martínez, 2009). On the other hand, there are also some investigations that discuss the effects of the use of paid means of communication by road safety promoters (García & López, 2017; Vega, 2004). Moreover, some of the studies found were also related to the treatment that is given to road prevention campaigns in the audiovisual media (Castelló, 2010; Martínez & Segura, 2012 and 2013; Segura, 2015; Vieira, 2016).

However, as mentioned earlier, investigations that link the topic of drug addiction with road safety are less frequent. In the Spanish case, some studies were found that focus on communication developed by public and private institutions, with the aim of preventing traffic accidents caused by drug use (Paricio et al., 2018; Paricio, Sanfeliu, Femenia, López-Trigo & Puchalt, 2017).

In light of the literature review carried out, it is concluded that, in Spain, there is a lack of studies that seek to understand the coverage that audio-visual media give to prevention campaigns that link the consumption of addictive substances with road safety. Thus, the relevance of this investigation is justified.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This investigation then analyses the effectiveness of public relations, in particular media relations, in the context of campaigns to prevent drug use and road safety, led by public and private institutions that are responsible for prevention, in Spain. In order to fulfil this objective, the informative treatment that these campaigns generate in the mass media was evaluated, more specifically, in the audio-visuals media.

With regard to the role that television and radio can play in the dissemination of campaigns on road safety and addictive substances, the initial hypotheses of the investigation are as follows:

1. the coverage of prevention campaigns in audio-visual media will be high, integrated and continuous throughout the year, so that these media can carry out a journalistic treatment of the topic that facilitates their integration in the media and public agenda;
2. the framing and thematization of campaigns in audio-visual media must be in harmony with the strategic objectives of the institutions working on prevention.

The general and specific objectives of the investigation are as follows:

1. to know the public relations strategies, in terms of prevention, developed by the main Spanish institutions that work in the prevention of drug consumption, paying special attention to relations with the media, in order to understand the respective consequences for road safety:
  - 1.1. to know the type of preventive actions developed;
  - 1.2. to know the objectives, strategies, types of audiences and substances prioritized by the institutions in their campaigns;
  - 1.3. to know the role of relations with the media, paying special attention to television and radio, as well as the frameworks they give to the subject;
2. to know the coverage and impact of campaigns on audio-visual media in Spain, during the period under study:
  - 2.1. to know and compare the coverage of the campaigns in the analysed media (television and radio);
  - 2.2. to know the impact of the informational treatment of campaigns on audiences;
  - 2.3. to know the economic value of the coverage generated in the audio-visual media;
3. to know the framework given to prevention campaigns on television and radio:
  - 3.1. to know the time frame of campaigns in audio-visual media;
  - 3.2. to know the weight of the different communication strategies in the informative treatment of the campaigns;
  - 3.3. to analyse the framework given to the information;
4. to know the substances prioritized in the news coverage of the campaigns.

To achieve the objectives described above, the study methodology combined qualitative and quantitative techniques, through semi-structured interviews and the respective content analysis, as well as through the application of the message exposure measurement method, which assesses the effectiveness of public relations strategies (Castillo & Álvarez, 2015; Wilcox et al., 2012).

Thus, seeking to fulfil the first objective of the investigation, semi-structured interviews were carried out with organizations that develop prevention campaigns in terms of drug addiction and road safety. To establish these contacts, a sample was selected, and a script was drawn.

For the group of respondents, three organizations (public and private) of national reference were selected, in the scope of prevention, namely: the General Traffic Directorate (DGT), the Foundation for Aid against Drug Addiction (FAD) and the Mapfre Foundation.

A guide was designed for the interviews shown in Table 1.

<b>1. ACTIONS, STRATEGIES AND PREVENTION</b>
<p>1.1. In light of the data on road safety accidents linked to the consumption of alcohol and use of drugs, what actions are being developed by your institution to reduce these figures?</p> <p>1.2. What type of preventive actions do you consider more efficient: informative, dissuasive (road control), educational (actions in educational centre) or others?</p>
<b>2. CAMPAIGNS AND PUBLIC RELATIONS</b>
<p>2.1. Do you carry out campaigns aimed at the prevention of drug use and its consequences for road safety?</p> <p>2.2. Do you include public relations actions?</p> <p>2.3. Related to these campaigns and public relations actions, what are your main goals?</p> <p>2.4. What type of strategies do you prioritise?</p> <p>2.5. Which substances do you focus on, or should you focus on more?</p>
<b>3. PÚBLICOS, MEIOS E CAMPANHAS</b>
<p>3.1. What are the campaign audiences?</p> <p>3.2. What role do media relations play in preventive campaigns?</p> <p>3.3. Which media are you more focused on?</p> <p>3.4. Which framings do you prioritise more in campaigns?</p>

Table 1: Interview script

The planning and application of the interviews took place between 2016 and 2017. After their completion and transcription, a content analysis of the main results was prepared. Piñuel and Gaitán (1999) define content analysis as the set of procedures and techniques applied to communication interactions that, previously registered, constitute the basic document of the study.

The type of content analysis applied was categorical (Bardin, 1996). To this end, a system of variables and categories was designed, with an ad hoc categorization, and a code book was elaborated (Table 2).

1	Strategies, types of programmes and/or campaigns carried out
2	Principal communication goals
3	Audience
4	Media use
5	Most valued framings
6	Prioritised substance

Table 2: Variables (content analysis)

In order to achieve objectives two, three and four of the investigation, the method of measuring exposure to the message was applied (Wilcox et al., 2012) which included the study of coverage and economic impact, through the systematic monitoring of campaigns through content analysis.

Thus, firstly, an assessment was made of the media coverage generated by the ten campaigns issued by DGT, FAD and the Mapfre Foundation (Table 3) on local radio and Spanish television channels, between 2011 and 2015 (Table 4).

1	DGT alcohol, summer 2011
2	DGT alcohol control, December 2011
3	DGT drugs and alcohol supervision, 2012
4	DGT control and supervision of the drugs and alcohol consumption in drivers, 2013
5	DGT drugs and alcohol supervision, 2014
6	DGT alcohol and drugs, 2014
7	DGT the most expensive joint of the world
8	DGT against drug use while driving (motor Mapfre), 2012
9	DGT level o alcohol while driving (motor Mapfre), 2015
10	FAD “Dance music not for dancing”

Table 3: Analysed campaigns

<b>TELEVISION</b>	13 TV
	Antena 3
	Canal 9
	Canal Sur
	Canal Sur Digital
	Cuatro
	Euskal Telebista
	Intereconomía TV
	La Sexta
	RTVCYL7
	RTVCYL 8
	Telecinco
	Telemadrid
Televisión de Galicia	
TVE 1	
TVE 24 horas	

<b>RADIO</b>	ABC Punto Radio Cadena COPE Cadena SER ESRadio Onda Cero Radio Intereconomía Radio Nacional de España
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Table 4: List of analysed media

During this period, the rates of drug use and road accidents in Spain were high (INTCF, 2017), as social concern on this topic was very low<sup>2</sup>.

To better understand this situation, in 2018, a search was made for the prevention campaigns broadcast between 2011 and 2015 in the audio-visual media, through a clipping platform, and 375 references were found, which constitute the corpus of the investigation. Then, the economic value of the coverage generated in the audio-visual media was calculated. Finally, a content analysis of the information on television and radio channels was carried out (Table 4) concerning the prevention campaigns under analysis (table 3).

As stated by Berelson (1952) and Bardin (1996), content analysis is a technique widely used for the objective, systematic and quantitative description of messages, in addition to allowing the inference of knowledge related to them. As mentioned, a categorical content analysis was carried out (Bardin, 1996), for which a code book was developed (Table 5).

<b>1. QUANTITATIVE ANALYSIS</b>	
A) Coverage	Ownership Scope
B) Impact	Audience
<b>2. ECONOMIC IMPACT ANALYSIS</b>	
<b>3. CONTENT ANALYSIS</b>	
A) Temporal framing – publication date	Months Days of the week
B) Spreading scope – geographic area	
C) Spatial framing by programme type	Informative (news, current affairs programmes, research programmes, etc.) Fiction (series, films) Entertainment (magazines, talk shows, reality shows, etc.) Specialised programs Others
D) Framing	Health Incidents/crimes Education Others
E) Messages type	Informative Emotional Others

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from [http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/11\\_barometros/indicadores.html](http://www.cis.es/cis/opencms/ES/11_barometros/indicadores.html)

F) Substances	Legal drugs (alcohol) Illegal drugs (cannabis, cocaine and others)
G) Corporative presence	Institution responsible for the campaign (DGT, FAD, Mapfre Foundation)

Table 5: Variables and analysis categories

## RESULTS

### MAIN RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEW

#### PREVENTION STRATEGIES AND CAMPAIGNS

The studied entities implemented different strategies while working on prevention (DGT), but almost all highlighted the importance of creating dissemination campaigns (DGT and Mapfre Foundation). In addition, they highlighted the relevance of surveillance activities (DGT and FAD), as well as actions implemented at the level of education (FAD).

Most respondents also highlighted the need to promote comprehensive and complementary strategies. DGT, for example, considers that it is more effective to combine several strategies: “informative for the general population, educational for the first ages and vigilant in health or social interventions”. FAD and the Mapfre Foundation agreed with this idea.

On the other hand, despite indicating that emotional campaigns are effective to promote recall and memorization, organizations also considered that it is necessary to maintain more informative and vigilant campaigns.

The opinions were, then, consensual when affirming that the communication campaigns have a great importance in the prevention of drugs consumption and in alerting to the respective consequences for road safety (FAD, DGT and Mapfre Foundation). FAD in particular, highlighted the essential role of communication and the work done by its professionals. In addition, interviewees considered it essential to establish relationships with the public in prevention strategies.

#### OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCES

The objectives favoured by the three organizations are, according to the results of the interviews: knowledge and awareness of the population in general (the DGT privileges knowledge about effects, consequences and sanction measures, while the Mapfre Foundation highlights information about risks), as well as early childhood education (FAD). DGT highlights the importance on “improving knowledge of the problem, its risks and sanctions”. On the other hand, FAD has evolved from “informational objectives for training, education of the person”. In addition, the Mapfre Foundation also invests in awareness.

About the type of campaign, depending on the audience, generalist information campaigns targeting the whole of society (DGT and FAD), the younger audiences (FAD



and Fundação Mapfre) and recurring audiences (FAD) predominate. The DGT, in particular, guides, above all, the “general population, people with recidivist behaviours and a young public” and the FAD extends the effects “to society, children, adolescents and young people, to trainers and to family”.

The media are, therefore, an essential public as generalist information campaigns predominate. In this sense, DGT, FAD and the Mapfre Foundation agree on the importance of increasing knowledge about the problem of drug use and the respective consequences for road safety by carrying out public relations actions through the mass media.

### **MEDIA RELATIONS AND PREVENTIVE CAMPAIGNS**

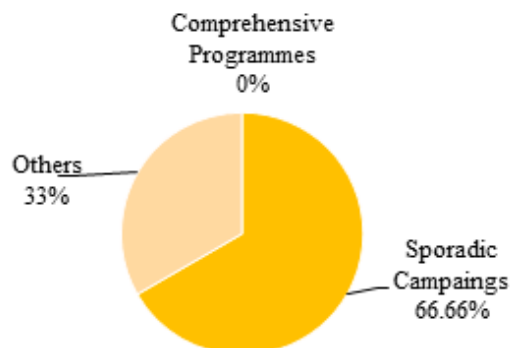
Regarding the type of media to which they target, the three organizations indicate their preference for generalist channels. The representative of the DGT, for example, recalled that the actions of this entity are focused, above all, on the mass media aimed at the population in general. On the other hand, although FAD recognizes the importance of actions in conventional ways, it also highlights public relations actions in other spaces and with other audiences, such as educational institutions and families.

The three entities then prioritize relations with the generalist and mass media, in particular, with television (DGT and Fundação Mapfre). In the opinion of the interviewees, the most effective campaigns are those that run in mass media and have the power to affect knowledge in the general population.

### **RESULTS OF THE CONTENT ANALYSIS OF THE INTERVIEWS**

#### **TYPES OF PROGRAMMES AND/OR CAMPAIGNS CARRIED OUT**

As mentioned, all the organizations interviewed emphasized the importance of promoting comprehensive strategies, however, none of them developed comprehensive long-term programs, and as can be seen in Graph 1, the majority (66%) carry out specific short and medium campaigns.



Graph 1: Communications and public relations programmes and campaigns

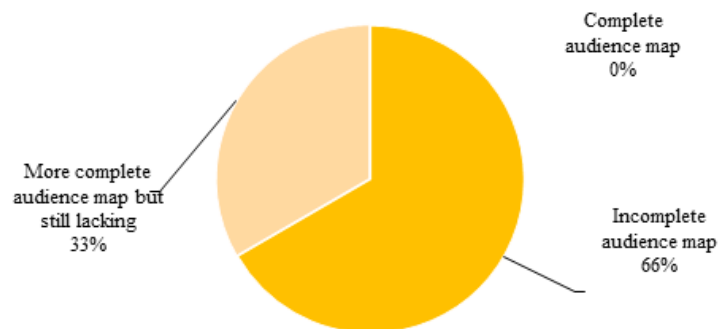
## OBJECTIVES AND AUDIENCES

The analysed institutions carried out campaigns aimed at the pursuit of various objectives, mainly cognitive and affective (Table 6). Cognitive goals predominate, being in 66% of the campaigns carried out in major media, aimed at the general population.

ORGANISATIONS	COGNITIVE	AFFECTIVE	BEHAVIOURAL	OTHERS
DGT	X		X	
FAD	X	X		
Mapfre Foundation		X		

Table 6: Communication goals

In none of the institutions studied did campaigns develop with a complete audience map (Graph 2). However, FAD was the one that sought to reach more audiences. In turn, DGT and Mapfre Foundation identified a small number of audiences.



Graph 2: Audiences and campaigns

Regarding segmentation by age, the three organizations have similar strategies since they coincide when addressing, mainly, the population in general and young people (100%). However, FAD also seeks to reach to children and adolescents (Table 7).

ORGANISATIONS	CHILDREN	TEENAGERS	YOUNG PEOPLE	ADULTS	GENERAL POPULATION
DGT			X		X
FAD	X	X	X		X
Mapfre Foundation			X		X

Table 7: Audience segmented by age

Even so, it was also noticed that, in the interviews, the representatives of the three entities mentioned other stakeholders as repeat consumers (66%), the family and the trainers (33%) (Table 8).

ORGANISATIONS	MEDIA	REPEAT CUSTOMER	FAMILIES	TRAINERS	INFLUENCERS	OTHERS (DRIVING SCHOOL, SCHOOL, HEALTH AUTHORITIES)
DGT		X				
FAD		X	X	X		
Mapfre Foundation						

Table 8: Other audiences

Still on the topic of audiences, it was noticed that none of the three institutions mentioned the media, influencers, driving schools, leisure centres, organizations dedicated to the production and distribution of legal drugs, non-governmental organization or foundations and companies, as important audiences.

#### **MEDIA, FRAMINGS AND PRIORITISED SUBSTANCES**

The organizations analysed carried out campaigns in the mass media, aimed at the population in general, with television as the preferred support.

Regarding the type of approach with which they would like the media to address the problem, all respondents agreed on the importance of the health information framework. In addition, 66,66% also stated that they favour educational and dissuasive frameworks.

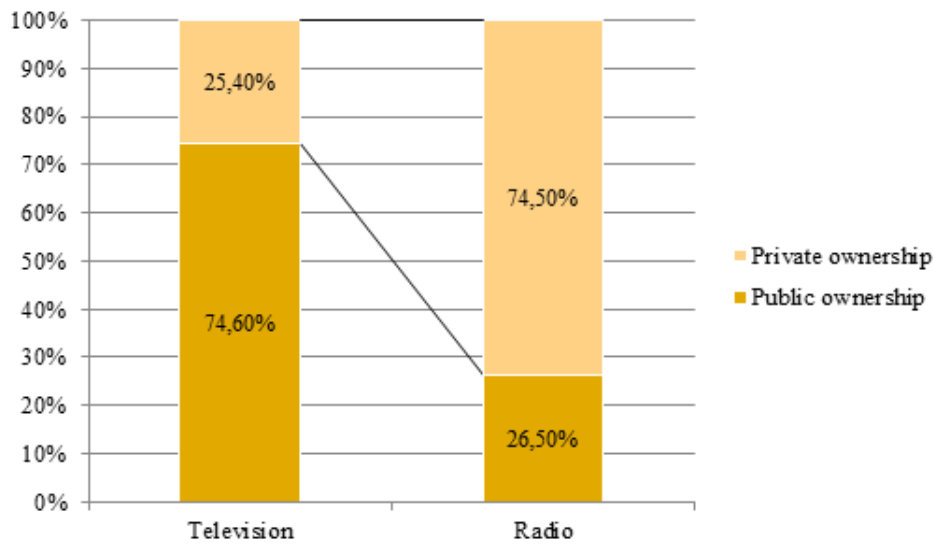
Finally, in the opinion of representatives of the institutions, campaigns to prevent alcohol consumption while driving should continue, although campaigns on the consumption of drugs such as cannabis and cocaine (FAD and Mapfre Foundation) should also be intensified, providing particular attention to information on the consequences of cannabis use on road safety.

#### **RESULTS OF THE METHOD OF MEASURING THE EXPOSURE TO THE MESSAGE**

##### **COVERAGE AND IMPACT**

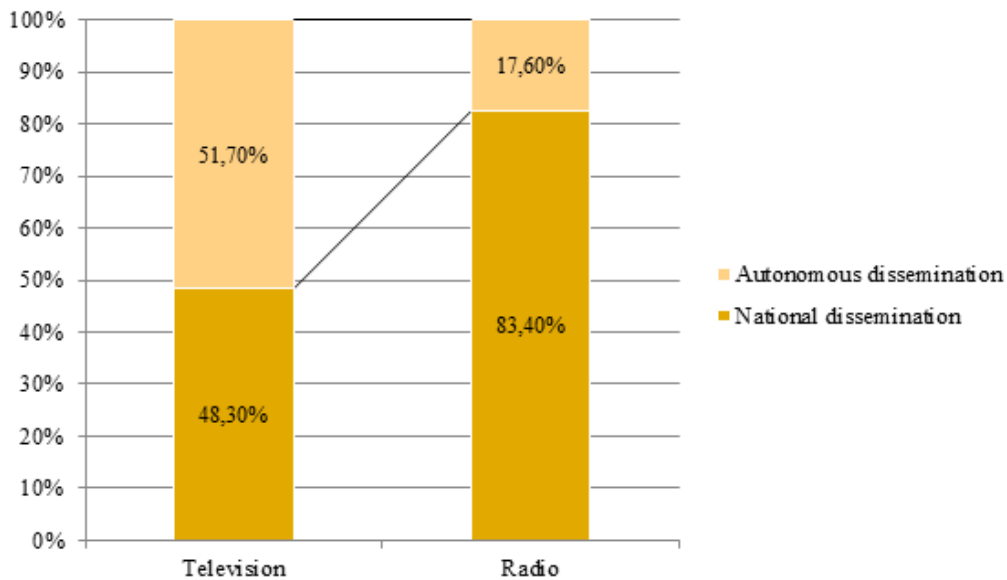
As mentioned, 375 campaign coverages were analysed (the average was of 0,25 daily reproductions), of which 224 correspond to television and 151 to radio.

Regarding ownership, on television, 74,6% of the references to campaigns were made on public stations, while 25,4% were made on private channels. The opposite is true for radio, as 26,5% of coverage refers to public stations and 74,5% to private stations.



Graph 3: Media ownership

On the other hand, on television 51,7% of the mentions of campaigns were carried out in platforms with autonomous dissemination and 48,3% within the scope of national dissemination (Graph 4). In radio, unlike television, 17,6% of coverage was carried out in stations with autonomous diffusion scope and 83,4% with national scope (Graph 4).



Graph 4: Scope of dissemination in the analysed media

The average audience was 328.086,5 viewers: television had 429.289 viewers and radio 226.848 listeners.

### ECONOMIC ANALYSIS RESULTS

The coverage generated a value of €441.870,21 (€429.289 euros would correspond to television and €12.581,22 to radio). The resulting average is €220.935,11 euros.

The Government of Spain, in turn, in the reports on “Advertising and Institutional Communication”<sup>3</sup>, informs about the investment made in DGT campaigns, but does not indicate the campaigns to which the investment corresponds or the difference between public relations and advertising campaigns.

	TELEVISION	RADIO
2011	No details	
2012	€2.634.777	€3.806.968
2013	€2.991.307	€3.316.422
2014	€3.200.644,7	€3.557.764,59
2015	€2.989.473,25	€3.581.719,19

Table 9: DGT investment 2011-2015

Source: <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es>

The investment data of the other entities analysed are not publicly accessible.

### RESULTS OF THE ANALYSIS OF CATEGORICAL CONTENT

The presence of the theme in the media is irregular, taking into account the months and days of media coverage of the campaigns. As can be seen in Table 10, the month with the greatest presence of campaigns was December, both on television and radio (49,5% on television and 55,6% on radio). On television, in addition to this month, it is also worth mentioning the coverage in June (20,4%), July (15,2%), April (13,1%) and August (14,3%). On the radio, in turn, the months of April (17,2%), August (17,2%) and June (11,2%) stand out. On the other hand, there are four months (January, February, March and September) where the presence of campaigns on radio and television is almost nil.

MONTHS	TV (MENTIONS PRESENCE IN %)	RADIO (MENTIONS PRESENCE IN %)
January	0,4	0
February	0	0
March	0	0
April	13,1	17,2
May	3,4	0,6
June	20,4	11,2
July	15,2	6,6

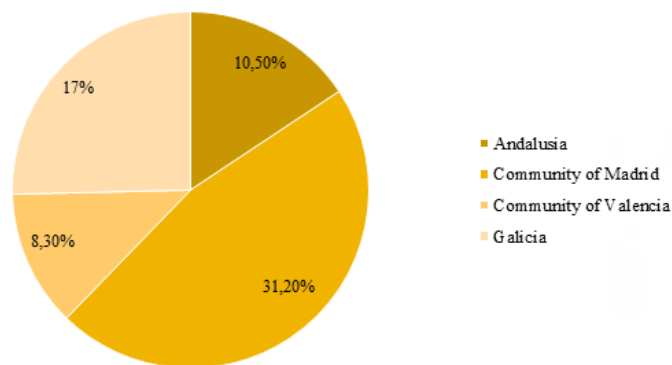
<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.lamoncloa.gob.es/serviciosdeprensa/cpci/Paginas/PlanesEInformes.aspx>

August	14,3	17,2
September	0	0
October	4	0,6
November	1,3	0,6
December	49,5	55,6

Table 10: Presence of campaigns in television and radio per month

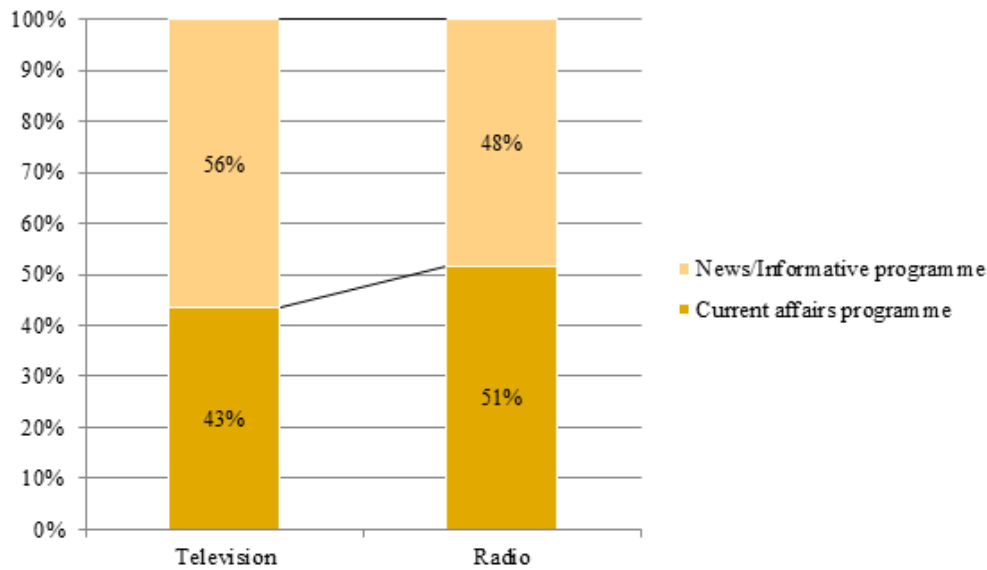
Regarding the days of the week on which there is greater media coverage, Sunday and Monday are highlighted on both television and radio. Regarding the framework, transgressions/crimes are privileged. During the rest of the week, coverage is low.

As regards the distribution of coverage by geographic areas, the Community of Madrid (31,2%), Galicia (17%), Andalusia (10,5%) and the Valencian Community (8,3%) registered greater coverage (Graph 5).



Graph 5: Analysis of the dissemination scope

When analysing the type of programs in which the campaigns are mentioned, the news and topicality programs stand out, more specifically in the presentation of matters related to events and transgressions (Graph 6).



Graph 6: Framing by types of programmes

Regarding the type of messages, the information character predominates (93%), with emotional messages being scarce (4%).

Finally, with regard to the composition of the campaign, in 100% of the cases the institution responsible always appears and in 90,2% the substance is mentioned. It should be noted that, in most of the information analysed (89,5%), the substance treated is alcohol. It is noteworthy that in most of the analysed texts (89,5%), the treated substance is alcohol.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Regarding the first objective of the study, there was a use of combined strategies, privileging informative, educational and dissuasive messages, which reinforce the need to disseminate information campaigns. This aspect is consistent with the objectives mentioned by the representatives of the analysed institutions, who highlighted the importance of cognitive aspects in the creation of knowledge and awareness in the population.

It can also be deduced from the results of the interviews that mass media, in particular television, are considered more effective in generating knowledge in society in general.

However, there were important deficiencies in the management of public relations, particularly, since organizations do not work with a complete public map. In this case, the media were not mentioned as a priority audience even though, in fact, their fundamental role in running the campaigns was recognized.

The most mentioned substances, cannabis and alcohol, achieved more media coverage, since they are the substances that register the highest consumption rates in Spain, in addition to being more related to traffic accidents.

Discussing the most mentioned frameworks, the health information bulletin stood out, being the most highlighted by the institutions analysed. However, other frameworks were highlighted by the entities studied, namely the educational and the dissuasive. For these organizations, said frameworks can be funnelled to promote knowledge and awareness about the consequences of drug use in terms of road safety among the population.

Pertaining to the second objective of the investigation, the evaluation of exposure to the message in the analysed media (television and radio) allowed to conclude that the public relations actions implemented in the ten studied campaigns lacked effectiveness, as these obtained a very low reputation (375 reproductions in five years, which implies 0,25 appearances per day).

Concerning the third objective, which sought to analyse the temporal framework of information pieces, it can be concluded that there is a concentration of coverage in four months and two days of the week. From these data it is possible to deduce that, even though more road accidents are registered in certain periods, the lack of continuity in the media coverage of the campaigns can result in the dispersion of the message. As such, this lack of frequency and continuity throughout the year does not favour placing the topic on the media agenda, and consequently, on the public agenda.

There was also a notable difference in the ownership of the media and its type of dissemination. In this regard, it should be noted that, in the case of radio, private coverage was superior to public, and this is surprising data since road safety is a topic of public interest and responsibility. However, the fact that these two media complement each other in the campaigns, not reinforcing each other, so it is difficult to verify the existence of an integrated strategy in the management of relations with the audio-visual media.

Still with respect to the third objective of the study, and due to the value generated by the media coverage, there is a low profitability and a low return on public relations actions, which did not reach half a million euros in 10 campaigns, during four years.

Finally, regarding the fourth objective, the predominant framework is that of events/ crimes. This data opposes the objectives of the institutions that work in the field of prevention, which prioritized health, education and deterrence frameworks.

Concerning the type of programs in which the campaigns were mentioned, no reference was found in specialized and research programs, highlighting information and current affairs programs. This fact, together with the short duration of media coverage (less than one minute on average), does not favour the awareness of the problem.

The objectives of the studied entities are not completely fulfilled, regarding the prioritized substances, due to the null presence of cannabis and the almost exclusive reference to alcohol, which dominates the discussion of the problem. Thus, it is concluded that the effectiveness of the relations with the related media seems scarce. Although organizations said that cannabis is one of the substances with a high rate of consumption among young people, the mass media did not address the issue.



Another conclusion of the study is that, despite the high reference to the institutions responsible for the campaigns, the low coverage and little continuity do not favour their notoriety throughout the year.

From the conclusions presented and recalling the first hypothesis of the investigation, this is now refuted, as the coverage in the media is not high, integrated or continuous throughout the year. Despite the predominance of texts on information, in line with one of the strategies favoured by the analysed entities, the reduced coverage does not favour the dissemination of the message in society.

It can be observed that the framework, as well as the thematization of the phenomenon analysed, are not in line with some objectives mentioned by the representatives of the institutions studied, which privilege the frameworks of health and education. As such, the second hypothesis of the investigation is refuted.

For all these reasons, the management of relations with the audiovisual media cannot be considered effective, within the scope of the analysed campaigns. As noted, organizations working on prevention do not occupy the desired place on the media agenda, nor do they achieve influence on the public agenda.

However, from this work and its limitations, it is not possible to deduce whether the deficiencies observed in the media coverage are the result of the management carried out by the communication offices of the institutions or if they are a consequence of the interest and routines of television and radio. Such a conclusion would require a complementary investigation that included the view of professionals in these media. Therefore, we contemplate the possibility of integrating the analysis in question in the second study that will continue the investigation carried out, evaluating the campaigns of the following five years (2016-2020).

Translation: M<sup>a</sup> Pilar Paricio Esteban, María Puchalt López and Sandra Femenia Almerich

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## **COMMUNICATION AT THE SUPERIOR CONSERVATORIES OF MUSIC IN ANDALUSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The research is based on the study of public relations in the five Andalusian music conservatories currently active, which account for 16% of music education centers in the country: Real Conservatorio Superior de Música Victoria Eugenia in Granada; Conservatorio Superior de Música Andrés Vandelvira in Jaén; Conservatorio Superior de Música de Málaga; Conservatorio Superior de Música Rafael Orozco in Córdoba; and Conservatorio Superior de Música Manuel Castillo in Seville. The research approach was developed through the contextualization of the conservatory system in the historical-national panorama and the study of their relationships in the internal and external scope. This whole process was studied from the perspective of educational and institutional communication through semi-structured interviews with the members of the management teams of each of the centers; through bibliographic and documentary examination; the analysis of social networks' content (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) and the official web pages of each institution. As a result, this study shows that the public relations of the top conservatories of music go beyond the educational sphere and as they are generative paradigms and diffusers of the heritage of their city and their community as a whole.

### **KEYWORDS**

conservatories; Andalusia; communication; public relations; internal communication; external communication

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## **A COMUNICAÇÃO DOS CONSERVATÓRIOS SUPERIORES DE MÚSICA DA ANDALUZIA**

### **RESUMO**

A presente investigação centra-se no estudo das relações públicas nos cinco conservatórios superiores de música da Andaluzia (Espanha), que representam 16% dos centros de educação musical do país: o Real Conservatório Superior de Música Victoria Eugenia de Granada; o Conservatorio Superior de Música Andrés Vandelvira de Jaén; o Conservatorio Superior de Música de Málaga; o Conservatorio Superior de Música Rafael Orozco de Córdoba; e o Conservatorio Superior de Música Manuel Castillo de Sevilha. Neste contexto, realizou-se um estudo sobre a sua comunicação, centrado em dois aspetos: na contextualização dos conservatórios no panorama histórico-nacional (já que são instituições que datam do século XVII) e na análise das suas relações e interações no âmbito interno e externo. A temática foi abordada na perspetiva da comunicação educacional e institucional, através da realização de entrevistas semiestruturadas com membros das equipas de gestão de cada um dos centros; mediante a análise bibliográfica e documental; e recorrendo à análise do conteúdo nas redes sociais (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram

e YouTube) e dos sites oficiais de cada instituição. Como resultados, este estudo mostra que as relações públicas dos conservatórios superiores da música, para com os seus públicos, vão para além do campo educacional e permitem definir os conservatórios como geradores e disseminadores de paradigmas do património da sua cidade e da sua comunidade como um todo.

#### **PALAVRAS-CHAVE**

conservatórios; Andalusia; comunicação; relações públicas; comunicação interna; comunicação externa

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#### **INTRODUCTION**

This research is based on the study of the existing public relations activities in the five Andalusian higher conservatories of music currently active, which account for 16% of Spanish musical education centers. These centers, in addition to offering equivalent education to the university level, develop a specific and unique type of education, as their central objective is the artistic dimension and, therefore, their functions and professional activity go beyond teaching, contributing to the promotion of social awareness about the importance of cultural heritage, its impact in different fields and its ability to generate significant values. All these roles, included in Royal Decree 21/2015, require conservatories to establish constant contact with other entities, and to organize themselves externally and internally, generating important communication actions. In fact, as reflected in the regulations governing the higher education musical centers, the performance of public activities, internally and externally, is an indispensable requirement in the training of students, as it helps in opening up and provides a complete artistic education.

#### **COMMUNICATION AND CONSERVATORIES**

Andalusian higher conservatories of music are historical institutions that have a background in the 17<sup>th</sup> century (music schools, high schools, etc.). The first music conservatories arose around 1900 and higher education was established in Andalusia from 1970, as shown in Figure 1 (Haro-Almansa & Van Zummeren-Moreno, 2017).



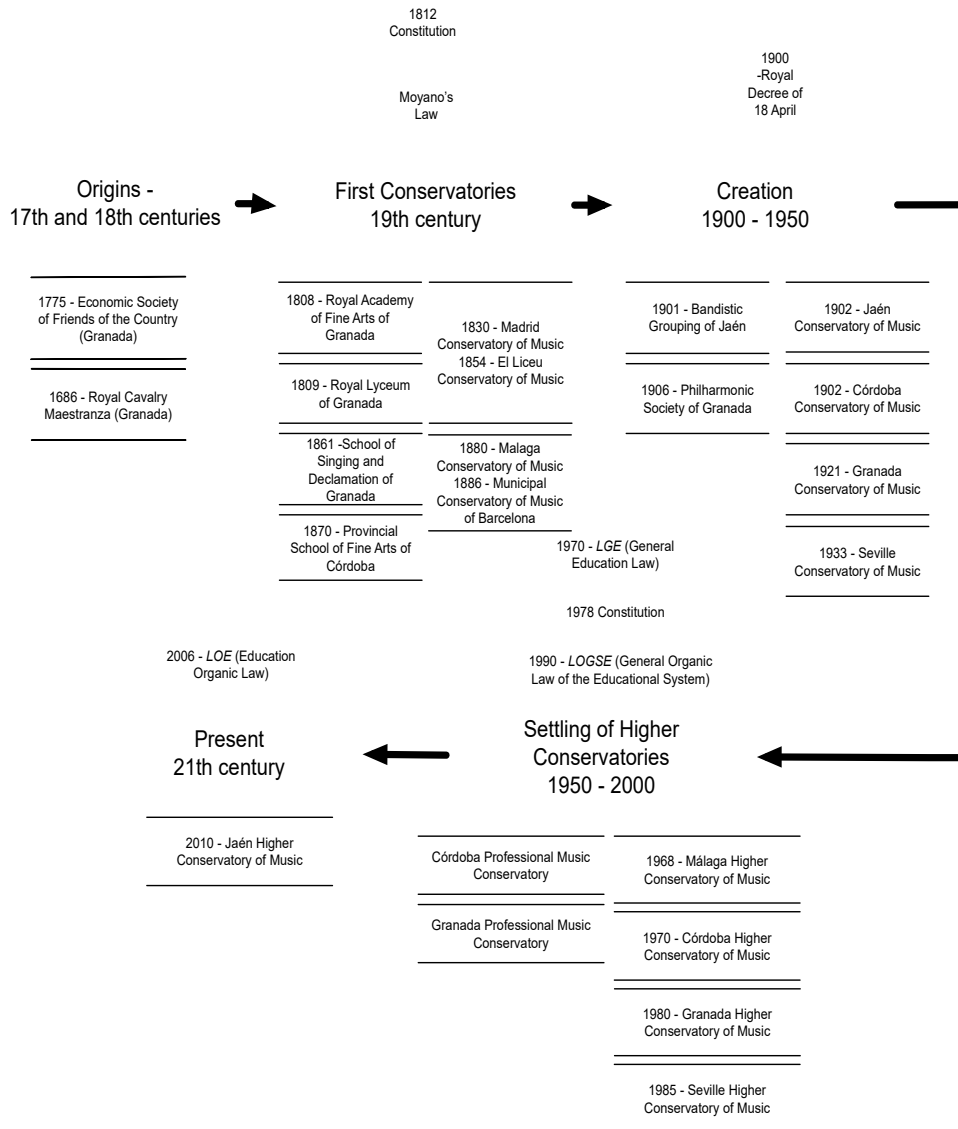


Figure 1: Origins and development of the Andalusian conservatories  
 Source: Haro-Almansa & Van Zummeren-Moreno, 2017, pp. 284-296

As for Public Relations, they were born approximately a century and a half ago, primarily in the United States, and afterwards in other European countries, such as Germany, Great Britain or The Netherlands, among others (Arceo Vacas, 2006, p. 112). As Mayaux (1991, p. 96) and Schultz, Tannebaum and Lauterborn (1994, p. 27) suggest the communicative activity was born with the objective of influencing, reinforcing or modifying the attitude towards the organization or modifying its behavior.

To demonstrate the importance of communication, Valls (1986) indicates that “no company, association, grouping, administration, entity or action of any kind is able to survive on the margin or without adequate communicative action. In the age of omnipresent communication, you create your own image or others create it” (p. 15).

The first Spanish book dealing with public relations was published in 1957, with the title of *Las relaciones públicas en el ámbito local* (Public relations at the local level) and

it was written by Luis Marqués Carbó and Luis Marqués Canos, that treated the subject from a professional perspective (Almansa Martínez, 2004) and addressed it within the framework of communication in public administrations.

Over the years, Public Relations has reached an appreciable theoretical framework in Spain with theoretical contributions from Carretón Ballester (2014), Castillo Esparcia (2010), Matilla (2014) or Xifra (2005) that explain the activity and define its functions. From their perspective, Public Relations is defined as “a discipline that has an essential presence within organizations because it contributes to the strategic management of communication of any organization” (Castillo Esparcia, 2010, p 11).

The configuration of the concept of public space, linked to the administration and informative-persuasive communication, often used as institutional communication, also has a broad bibliography with contributions from Alameda García and Fernández Blasco (2002), Alvarado López and De Andrés del Campo (2005), Caro (2010), Feliu García (2004), García López (2001), Garrido Lora, Ramos-Serrano and Rodríguez Centenero (2007), or Vilches (2010).

Following these lines of thought, Moreu (2005) points out that the problem of public communication is that it has become “a heterogeneous administrative activity, very difficult to define and categorize that can be identified as “a tailor’s box” in which manifestations, such as political information, public relations, general information on administrative services, interpersonal dialogue or institutional advertising, fit” (p. 42). Campillo Alhama adds that it develops through the strategies and lines of action of public agencies, through three tools planned in a synergistic and simultaneous way: institutional advertising, information relations management and the establishment of institutional relations (Campillo Alhama, 2010, p. 49).

Another concept to take into account is that of information and communication technologies, since in the “network society the actors are human beings, but these are organized into networks” (Castells, 2006, p. 773). Currently, no one can ignore the convening power and the mobilization capacity of new technologies (Almansa Martínez & Castillo Esparcia, 2015). In fact, “social networks represent a new opportunity for communication and considers that its success lies in the fact that they allow the construction of a personal or professional network around oneself” (Xifra, 2011, pp. 238-244).

As a result, Capriotti (2009) points out:

new technologies are impacting all organizations, and will even have more influence in the future. They have had a relevant impact on many aspects of organizational structures and processes and have also affected the way in which organizations and employees communicate. However, the implementation of new technologies should not be considered as the panacea that will solve all the problems of internal communication. (p. 51)

In this context, conservatories must develop quality relationships in the information channels, a dialogic aspect that helps to build a critical and informed society that complies with public service work (Martínez Vallvey, Mellado-Segado & Hernández-Tristán,

2017). Despite this, although students consider themselves competent in the use of digital resources and presenting a positive attitude towards them, they limit themselves to using traditional means for their academic tasks to the detriment of web 2.0 tools (Brazo, Ipiña & Zubergoitia, 2011; Duncan-Howell, 2012; Kennedy et al., 2007; Roig-Vila & Pascual, 2012).

## METHODOLOGY

This research is based on the hypothesis that within the higher conservatories there is an internal communication flow equivalent to that of any educational institution, however, their actions in the external field and their commitment to the musical cultural heritage make these centers into paradigms generating and preserving culture and art. Therefore, in order to analyze how internal and external relations occur, we have established as general objectives: to comprehend and study the legislative, social, functional and administrative context of the higher conservatories of music in Andalusia; as well as to analyze their public relations activities.

Based on these objectives, the *hypothetic-deductive* method is used primarily. In turn, a type of explanatory-descriptive research is carried out, since the characteristics of a specific group or phenomenon (the Andalusian conservatories) are shown, and this information is processed to understand the behavior and the relationship between the variables, knowing the factors that influence the data obtained (Lafuente Ibáñez & Marín Egoscózába, 2008). The research was framed in a type of non-experimental design, as the phenomenon was observed in its natural context, in order to perform its analysis.

At the same time, the research has qualitative and qualitative-quantitative approaches, due to the research techniques used:

- bibliographic and documentary analysis, which is defined as “a technique that consists in the selection and collection of information through the critical reading of documents and bibliographic materials, of newspaper libraries, documentation and information centers” (Sierra Bravo, 1985, p. 317). Through this research technique, the history of the superior conservatories has been reviewed: its previous institutions, legislation, the beginning of professional conservatories and the creation of the superior music conservatories;
- content analysis, a qualitative-quantitative modality, is a “set of research methods and techniques aimed at facilitating the systematic description and interpretation of the semantic and formal components of all types of messages, and the formulation of valid inferences about the data collected” (Krippendorff, 1990, p. 29). This research technique is used to extract information from the official websites of the conservatories, as well as from the official profiles of these centers on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube. The analysis sheet reviews individually each publication made in the period from September 2018 to January 2019, analyzing: the number of comments, likes, shares; themes (news, competitions, courses, master classes, cycles, concerts, conferences, magazines, Erasmus, congratulation, employment and news); to whom it is addressed (center staff, external or without distinction); page responses; hashtags; online activity; web links, profiles and pages;
- Semi-structured interviews, as “interviews that start from a script that predetermines the information that is required. In this case, the questions are open, which allows greater flexibility and nuances in the answers” (Fàbregues Feijóo, 2016, p. 104). With this research technique, information about the historical and cultural context, operation, structure and organization of Andalusian centers has been collected. Current members of the management team of each of the conservatories have responded to the interview. More specifically, the interviewees have been Celia Ruiz (director

of the Granada Higher Conservatory of Music); Israel Sánchez López (director of Seville Higher Conservatory of Music); and Francisco Martínez González (director of Malaga Higher Conservatory of Music). At the express request of the member of the management team of the Conservatory of Córdoba, his name and position will not appear cited verbatim, and instead: "Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory".

## RESULTS

### INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication and coordination flows in most conservatories are similar, since these are centers of unique educational functions. All members of management teams confirm that their interpersonal relationships occur in a normal, fluid, democratic and transparent manner (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory). The main positions that form the internal communication levels are: the management team (director, head of studies and secretary), department heads, head of cultural activities, teachers, school board, student associations and students.

The predominant communication direction is of descending and linear type. It is descending because most of the communication occurs from the management to the administrative team, the department heads, the faculty and the school board. It should be emphasized also the importance of the relationship between the head of cultural activities and other positions in order to carry out or solve tasks (Israel López, Seville Conservatory). In addition, it was stated that "in terms of coordination and organization, everything is formally channeled from the management, although the departments have an important weight (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory). In the same way, it is confirmed that the decision process is shared, because, as Celia Ruiz (Granada Conservatory) supports, "decisions outside the regulations of the center are taken by agreement of the teachers, the school board and the technical team".

In order to communicate with teachers, all conservatories point out the use of formal communication as the predominant and preferred type of communication actions, including the notification of incidents, debates on internal issues and resolution approval.

However, this phenomenon also coexists with a large flow of informal communication in the field of development and implementation of activities, which has been increased in recent years due to the entry of new information and communication technologies: as WhatsApp, email, and so on (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory).

### TOOLS

Below are described the predominant communication tools in Andalusian higher conservatories. Formal meetings are the main tools of formal communication internally. In the Granada Conservatory about three or four teachers' meetings are held annually and weekly groups of about ten people are summoned (with faculty members, department heads, technical team, work groups, or school board members) (Celia Ruiz, Granada

Conservatory). Assemblies and meetings with students are held annually and occasionally quarterly (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory).

The informal interview is also very relevant, as conservatories have a small number of teachers (around 100) who usually coincide in hours and facilities.

Email is considered a relevant formal communication tool, especially in Córdoba and Granada conservatories. Both indicate the importance of disseminating information through mailing lists with hidden addresses.

The use of WhatsApp is not unanimous. While in some centers it is not used (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory), in others it is indicated as one of the main tools of group communication (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory), or as a favorite tool in informal matters (Celia Ruiz, Granada Conservatory).

Intranet has independent features in each center. While in some it is not available, such as Córdoba Conservatory; or is in disuse, like the Model program in the Granada Conservatory because of its inefficiency; other centers have indispensable online programs: as Séneca in Malaga Conservatory, for communication with teachers and students; or miConservatorio at Seville Conservatory.

Few centers have manuals. In the Granada Conservatory they affirm that it is an indispensable informative tool, it is published annually and it contains all the data related to the operations and the academic information of the center.

The web and official social networks are common tools in all centers with diverse uses. While some claim not to use them internally (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory), others admit to use them to exclusively to publish news for the center's target population.

The bulletin boards, and their content, in the form of posters, diptychs, or hand programs, currently have a prominent use internally.

Finally, the teaching guide is an indispensable document for the exercise of teaching and communication in the higher conservatories of music.

## EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

The actions of external communication in the Andalusian higher conservatories of music are reflected mainly in a local and regional panorama, without national and international coverage (except in few occasions). For Andalusian conservatories, external communication is of vital importance:

it is intended to make contact with the environment and not be an isolated entity (...) and when there are artistic performances in the conservatory, the action runs out with the presentation, because it does not have external factors involved. Opening up is important to function. (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory)

Communication with external institutions occurs formally, through agreements, contracts and minutes (Israel López, Seville Conservatory). However, once these actions have been carried out, meetings, work projects and suggestions flow informally, through

telephone calls, WhatsApp, email, intranet, and so on (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory).

The predominant positions in the field of external communication are described below:

- the management is responsible for establishing contact, promoting and developing collaboration agreements with external entities (Israel López, Seville Conservatory);
- the department of artistic activities or the head of studies have assigned planning, development and mediation functions between the different departments, the management and the external entities;
- the members of the departments coordinate the communication actions and are responsible for involving the students, who act as the main stakeholder and active public;
- the public of the events held by the conservatories is mainly active (including participants in courses, conferences, etc.), although there is a significant number of passive public (as concert audiences). The latter is internal or local, small in number and has as main profiles family members, faculty members or students.

### EXTERNAL INSTITUTIONS

The Andalusian higher conservatories of music establish contact mainly with external institutions framed within the scope of their city and surroundings. Among the five Andalusian conservatories there is coordination on specific issues, such as access to higher education that are carried out as a single district (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory). There are also collaborations with other national and international conservatories (as the web and social networks of the center shows), professional conservatories of music or conservatories of dance and dramatic arts.

The city councils and surrounding towns, with their corresponding delegations and cultural councils, are important partners of the conservatories. Likewise, the councils are present in the main contacts of the Córdoba and Seville Conservatories, while in Granada and Malaga they claim to have relationships about specific matters, not being very relevant and of merely administrative type.

The universities are also part of the contacts of Seville, Malaga and Granada conservatories. According to Francisco Martínez (Malaga Conservatory) the “contact with universities is one of the most important due to the debate about the integration of music centers in the universities. To this end, numerous projects and contacts with the rectors and vice-chancellors are encouraged”. However, from other centers it is considered that this contact is a matter of different councils (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory).

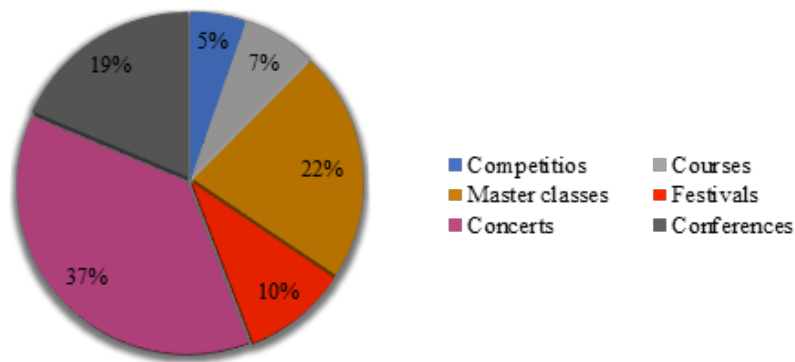
Regional orchestras and music bands are also common partners, as well as foundations, museums and private entities. The Barenboim-Said Foundation or the Andalusian Culture Foundation (Seville Conservatory) stand out, as well as the Musical Foundation of Malaga (Malaga Conservatory) or the Emasagra Foundation (Granada Conservatory).

The theatres and local auditoriums are some of the main external partners. This is the case of the Seville Conservatory, which does not have an auditorium, and therefore demands the development of contacts with such entities to project advancement (Israel López, Seville Conservatory).

## EVENTS AND ACTIVITIES

Events and activities carried out within the conservatories can be organized into the following categories: competitions; courses or workshops; festivals, cycles or meetings; concerts, recitals and auditions (didactic, solo, orchestra, chamber or band); conferences, exchanges or seminars.

According to the data obtained from the official websites, the proportion of activities occurs in the following order: concerts, master classes, conferences, festivals, courses and competitions.



Graph 1: Events and activities in the Andalusian conservatories

Most of these activities are framed in the context of the center's facilities: auditoriums (with the exception of Seville), courtyards or large classrooms. Sometimes the events are premiered in the center prior to its staging outside of it (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory).

Each center has its own characteristic events:

- specialized courses, piano and contemporary music festivals, the contest of young performers and the cultural spring week (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory) take center stage at Cordoba Conservatory;
- at the Seville Conservatory “Las Noches del Carmen” (Carmen’s Nights) and “Santa Cecilia” festivals, the chamber music and soloists competitions, the symphony orchestra concerts (in collaboration with the conservatories of dance and dramatic art) at the Teatro de la Maestranza; the concerts and guitar recitals of the Museum of Arts and Customs of Seville and the “Sevilla Sax Meeting” (Israel López, Seville Conservatory);
- Malaga Conservatory highlights the concerts of the large groups of the center (symphony orchestra, chamber, band and big-band), the cycle of contemporary music, the conference of new technologies and internal competitions whose winners act with the large groups (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory);
- the billboard of events of Granada Conservatory is scheduled annually highlighting concerts of the chamber, symphony, band, choir and ensembles orchestras. Highlights include “Brass Meeting”, saxophone and contemporary music meetings, teacher concerts, the international symposium in collaboration with the University of Granada and the closing festival (Celia Ruíz, Granada Conservatory);
- as for Jaén Conservatory, according to its web section of activities, the chamber music contest and the solo contest stand out.

## TOOLS

External communication tools resemble those of internal communication (meetings, interviews, intranet, and so on). However, those used for dissemination and publicity purposes are chosen based on the characteristics and relevance of the event, taking into account the resources available.

Email and WhatsApp are the most widely used external communication tools.

A large part of the use of posters, leaflets and hand programs are used in internal communication (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory), although its relevance has occasionally transcended abroad as an advertising tool in buses and in local electronic signs (Israel López, Seville Conservatory).

“Press is a high costs medium” (Celia Ruíz, Granada Conservatory). Occasionally collaborations with other entities have given visibility in national press to the centers (Israel López, Seville Conservatory)), and timely internal events have been publicized (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory)).

“Accessibility to radio or television is unattainable for conservatories” (Celia Ruíz, Granada Conservatory). Like press, it occurs in cases of collaboration with external entities, although circumstantially some local channels have offered to disseminate information on specific centers (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory).

However, the main external communication tools are the social networks and the center’s website.

## THE CENTER’S WEBSITE

It is one of the most important tools, although in some conservatories it is claimed that its use only reaches internal or local publics (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory). In the Andalusian higher conservatories, the website is run by the management team (Seville), a professor (Córdoba), the head of studies (Malaga) or external companies (Granada).

All official websites are among first positions of the main search engines. In Google they occupy the first position, although this phenomenon is not repeated in Yahoo, Bing and Duckduckgo, since they descend from two to four positions or do not appear.

The design of the home page in most cases is similar. The logo of the center appears, a slide show, top main menu (except Seville), academic news, news, upcoming events, contact information, internal search engine (except Jaén) and direct links to social networks (except Cordoba). They also have accessibility options: font size changes and adaptation to other languages (mostly English).

The contents are also similar: context, academic, resources, news and events information.

As a context they have: welcome or greeting from the principal (except Malaga and Seville), history of the conservatory (except in Jaén), organization chart, and school board. In some centers there is also the curriculum of the teachers (Jaén and Granada), a link to their personal website (Seville) or information about the student association (Jaén and Seville).



Regarding academic information, we can find: curricula (except Seville), access, end studies work (TFT) (except Córdoba), teaching guides (except Córdoba), calendars (except Malaga), enrolment, credit recognition (except Seville) and Erasmus.

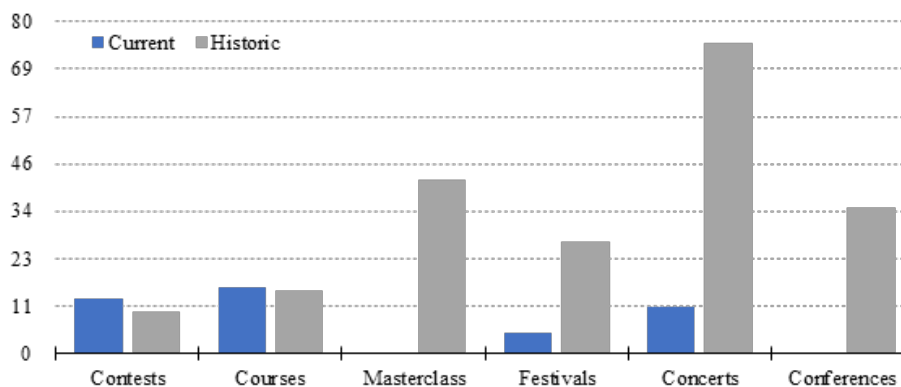
The resources offered are: center magazines, library (Malaga and Jaén) and gallery.

Regarding the contact information they provide: email from the management team, center address, center email, telephone, fax, intranet access (Jaén and Granada), contact forms (Malaga and Granada) and location (Córdoba and Granada).

External links include class blogs, department websites, pages of symphony orchestras, ministry, counselling, Andalusian institute and other conservatories.

News are described in detail and published as a blog. Its main announcements are: concerts, recitals and auditions (didactic, solo, orchestra, chamber or band) (37%); master classes (22%); conferences, exchanges or conferences (19%); festivals, cycles or meetings (10%); courses or workshops (7%); and contests (5%).

The information about news is not fully updated and a large percentage has expired as shown in Graph 2.



Graph 2: Web information (current and historic)

As peculiarities, some websites have a specific space for the department of cultural activities, recognitions, facilities, groupings, electives, regulations, application for degrees or external practices.

The number of broken links found was high: Jaén 11, Granada 27, Seville 75, Malaga 30. The website of Córdoba Conservatory does not contain any broken links.

### **SOCIAL NETWORKS**

“The website of the center is a detailed dissemination tool, the social networks are the fastest and most effective” (Celia Ruíz, Granada Conservatory). All members of the management highlight the use of social networks with the exception of Córdoba Conservatory, which states “there is a lot of distrust” (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory)).

Social networks, like the web, are managed by center staff, directors (Seville), or teachers (in the rest). The main social networks are: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube.

### Facebook

All higher conservatories of music have a Facebook page created in 2010 (Jaén), 2011 (Granada), 2012 (Malaga and Córdoba) and 2018 (Seville).

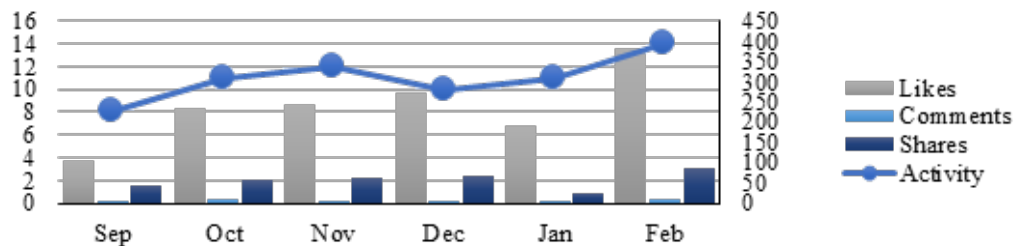
The user rating is positive 4,9 (Jaén), 3,6 (Granada) and 4,5 (Córdoba), however the number of ratings is very small (average of 15 ratings). The total number of visits amounts to 974 (Córdoba), 927 (Granada) and 643 (Jaén). The number of followers ranges between 2.000 and the number of likes is very different: 6.055 Córdoba, 5.712 Jaén, 2.463 Malaga and 16 Seville.

The activity in this social network oscillates between one and three publications per week of own elaboration (without shared publications), about 20 likes per publication, an average of five times shared, and a number less than one comment. Table 1 shows these specific values for each center.

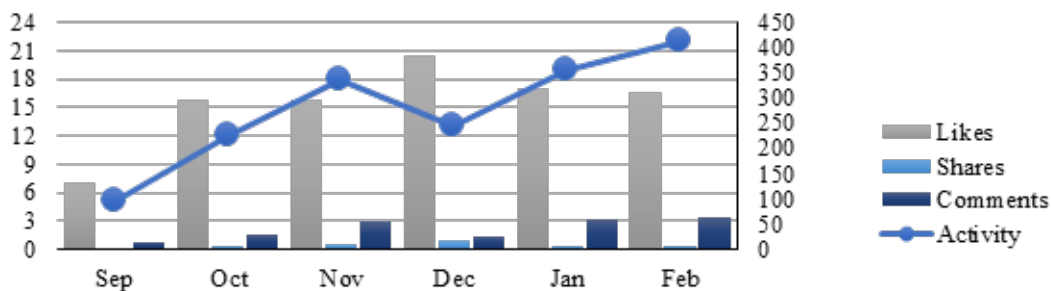
	JAÉN	MALAGA	SEVILLE	GRANADA	CÓRDOBA
Activity	2,9	1,9	0,2	3,7	0,2
Likes	20,5	29,1	0,4	19,5	14,5
Shares	4,7	10,7	0	2,7	8,5
Comments	0,1	0,4	0	0,4	0

Table 1: Facebook: activity and average interaction

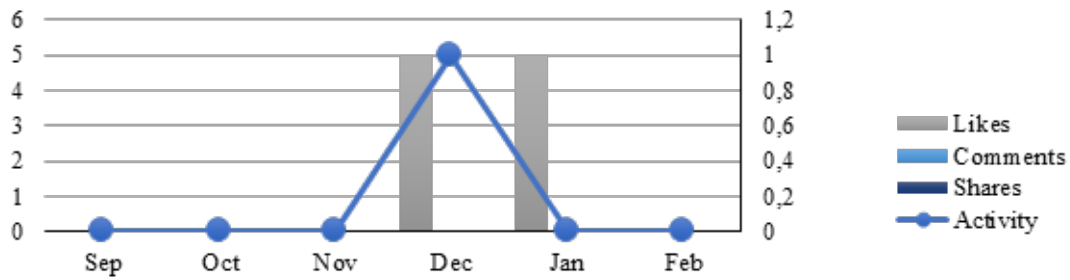
There is no defined activity common to each center, however, as shown in Graphs 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7, there is a greater number of movements of the followers the greater the activity (Jaén and Seville); while in others the activity is independent (Granada, Córdoba and Malaga).



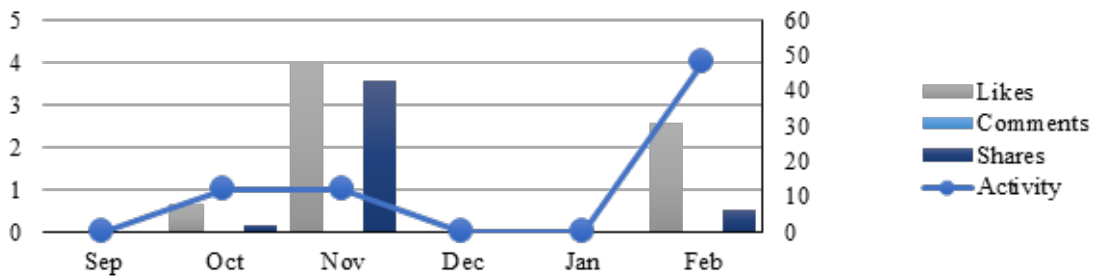
Graph 3: Jaén Conservatory Facebook activity



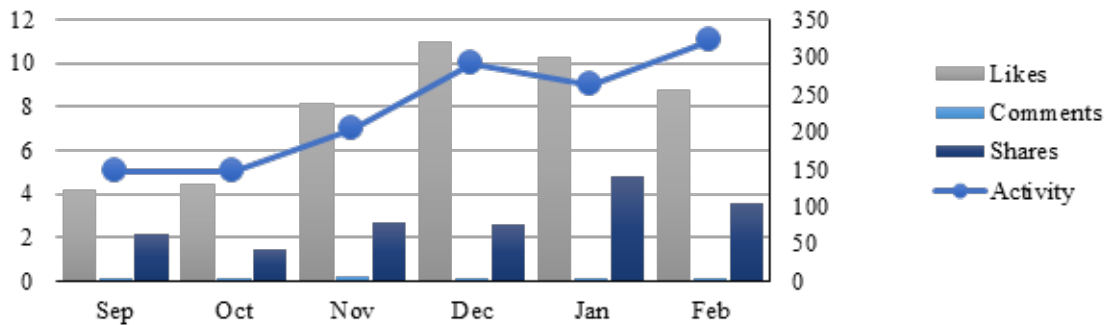
Graph 4: Granada Conservatory Facebook activity



Graph 5: Seville Conservatory Facebook activity

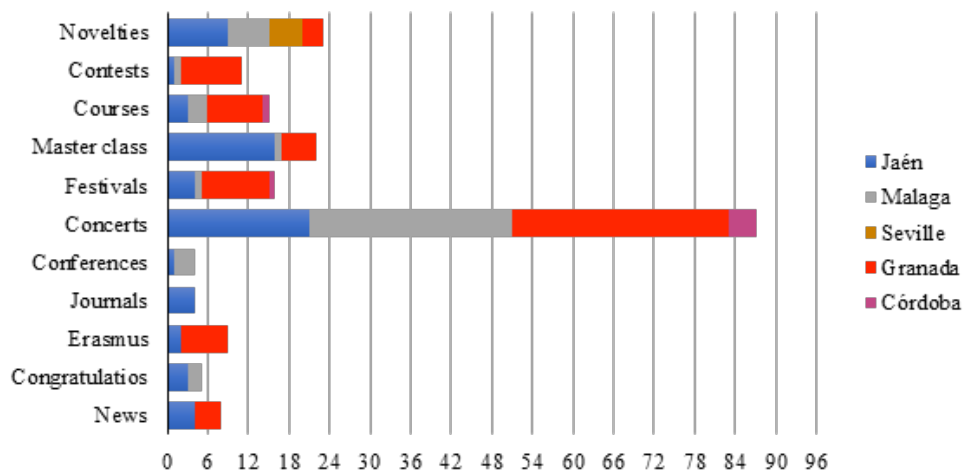


Graph 6: Córdoba Conservatory Facebook activity



Graph 7: Malaga Conservatory Facebook activity

It can be seen that February is the month of highest activity in all centers except in Seville. The month with the lowest activity is September. The novelties offered in this social network are established in the categories shown in Figure 8.



Graph 8: Facebook categories

As one can see, most of the events advertised on Facebook are concerts, and in descending order: news, master classes, festivals and courses. Regarding audiences, 12,6% of the publications are directed to the staff of the center, 0,5% to external staff, and no distinction is made in 82,5%.

As for the interaction offered by the page, only 1,12% of the publications got answers; 3,56% have integrated hashtags; 12,3% contain links to other websites, and 16,2% link to other profiles.

*Twitter*

Twitter is used in all conservatories and is a network with a lot of activity. Their profiles were created in 2009 (Sevilla), 2011 (Granada), 2012 (Córdoba), 2013 (Málaga) and 2016 (Jaén). They contain a number of very different tweets: Granada 1.498, Jaén 682, Malaga 333 and Córdoba 154. Their number of profiles followed is 1.933 Granada, 356 Jaén, 314 Malaga, 154 Córdoba and 31 Seville. As for its followers, Seville has 2.207, Granada 1.540, Málaga 972, Jaén 384 and Córdoba 30. The number of likes is also uneven: Jaén 848, Córdoba 599, Granada 282, Seville 17 and Malaga two.

Its weekly activity consists of its own tweets and retweets by others. The average weekly activity of tweets is 1,6, which have 1,5 likes, are shared 1,02 times, and are answered 0,084 times. As for retweets, the average weekly activity is 0,9 retweets, 2,44 likes, 1,82 times shared, and 0,032 answered.

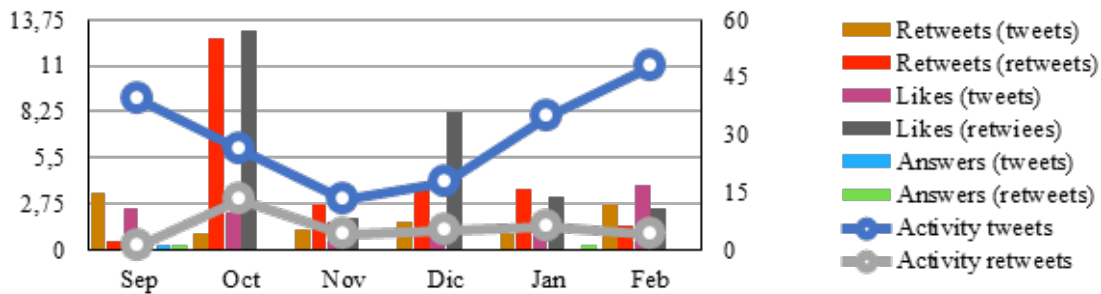
Table 9 shows the average weekly data for each center.

	JAÉN	MALAGA	SEVILLE	GRANADA	CÓRDOBA	
<b>Tweets</b>	Activity	2,6	1,2	1,7	2,7	0,04
	Likes	2,8	1,6	1,3	0,8	1
	Shared	1,7	0,9	1,1	0,4	1
	Answers	0,04	0	0,02	0	0

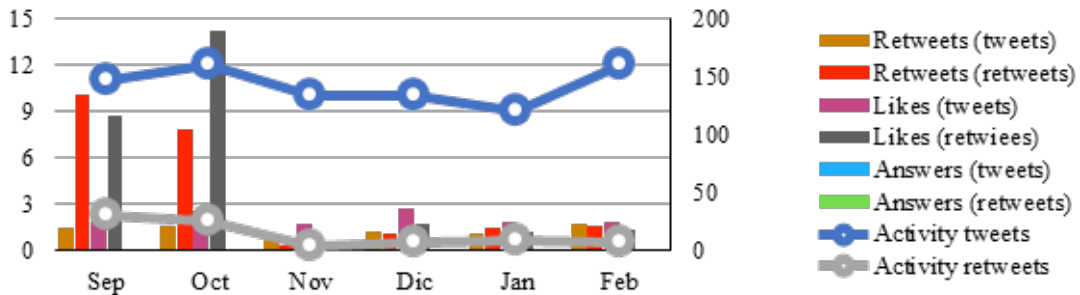
<b>Retweets</b>	Activity	3	0	1,3	0,1	0
	Likes	5,1	0	3,8	3,3	0
	Shared	4,2	0	3,2	1,7	0
	Answers	0,1	0	0,06	0	0

Table 2: Average weekly activity Twitter

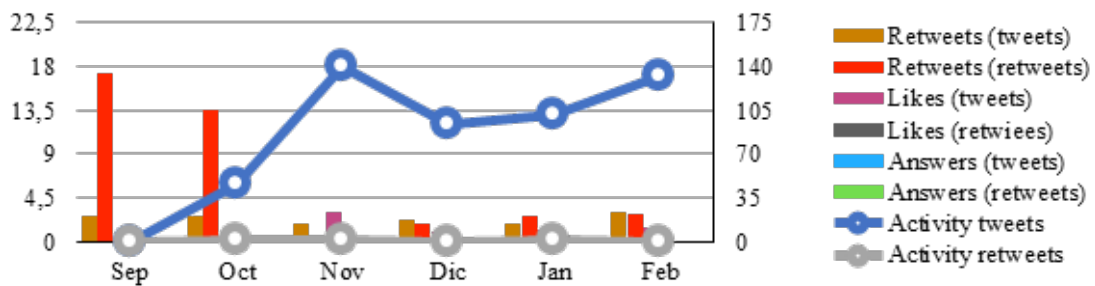
Graphs 9, 10, 11, 12, and 13 show the history of the social network, decoupling tweets and retweets. Malaga and Cordoba Conservatories do not contain retweets.



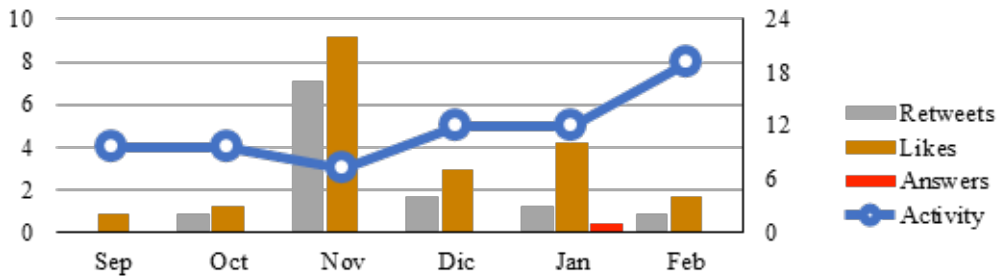
Graph 9: Seville conservatory Twitter activity



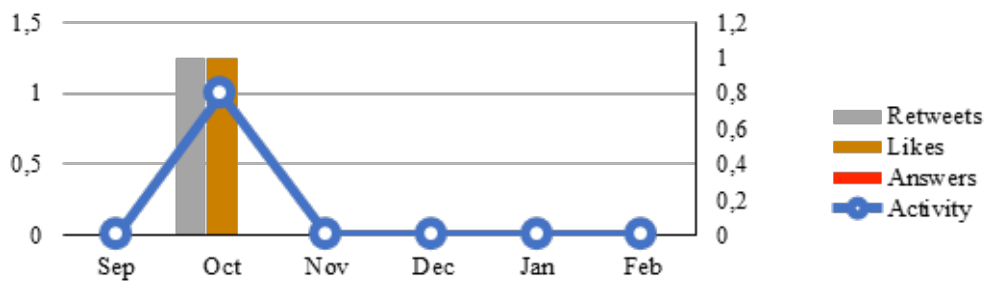
Graph 10: Jaén conservatory Twitter activity



Graph 11: Granada conservatory Twitter activity



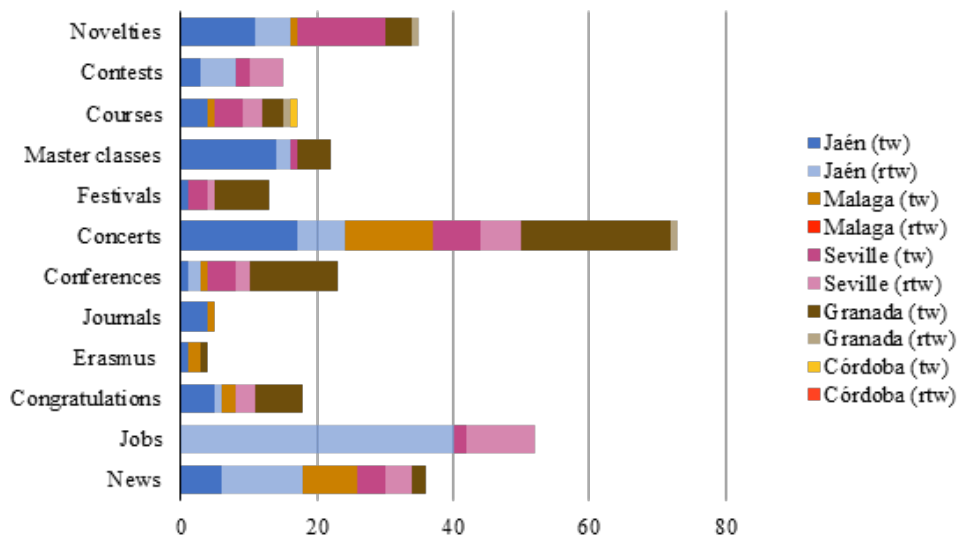
Graph 12: Malaga conservatory Twitter activity



Graph 13: Córdoba conservatory Twitter activity

Tweets are directed at 46,6% to center staff and retweets by 12,9%. As for external staff, tweets 9,7% and retweets 16,3%. Tweets without distinction represent 49,7% while retweets represent 17,9%. Regarding interaction topics, there are no responses from the page in tweets or retweets. The number of tweets containing hashtags is 16,3%, and the number of retweets is 36,52%. Web links contain 44,9% of tweets and 23,5% retweets, and profiles 12,7% of tweets and 40,9% of retweets.

As for the themes that is extracted from the previously described set of tweets and retweets, they are described in Graph 14.

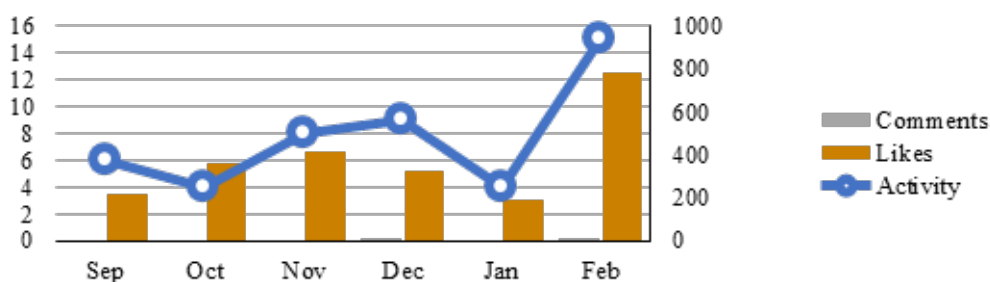


Graph 14: Twitter categories

### Instagram

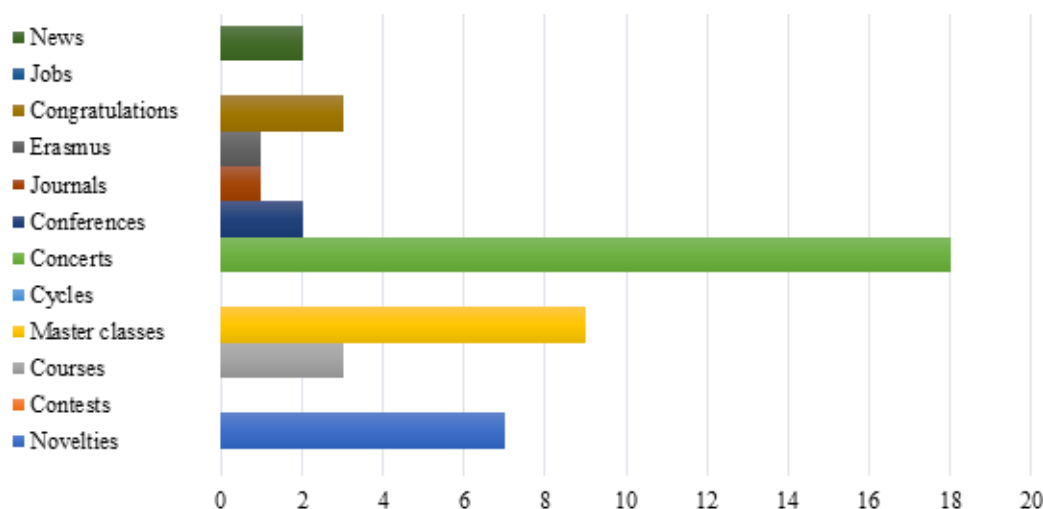
The use of Instagram is not predominant. Jaén and Seville conservatories have profiles, with 151 publications, 386 followers and 207 in a row (Jaén); and 0 publications, 234 followers and 435 in a row (Seville). Jaén Conservatory, being the only one with activity, has an average of 1,9 weekly publications, 50,2 likes per publication and 0,1 comments.

Graph 15 shows the history of the social network.



Graph 15: Jaén Instagram activity

Graph 16 shows the categories of publications in the social network.



Graph 16: Instagram categories

### YouTube

The YouTube social network is visible, but its content is scarce. Granada (created in 2010), Seville (2011) and Jaén (2016) have a page. Regarding the number of subscribers: 21 Granada, 44 Seville and 26 Jaén.

The activity of the Andalusian higher conservatories of music has not been constant in this social network. Jaén conservatory has made a total of 12 publications in 2018 (with 1.378 views, 22 likes and 1 dislikes); Seville has seven publications, from 2011 to 2017 (21.375 views, 42 likes and 15 dislikes); and Granada has one post, in 2010 (6.392 views, 20 likes and 11 dislikes).

With contents in the form of advertising videos and live concert recordings, the publications have had the average impact shown in Table 3.

	JAÉN	SEVILLE	GRANADA
Visualizations	114,8	3039	6392
Likes	1,8	6	20
Dislikes	0,08	2,1	11
Descriptions	0,8	1	1
Comments	0,08	0,4	0

Table 3: Medium impact YouTube

Some conservatories explain the lack of content on YouTube due to the lack of adequate sound and recording equipment (Celia Ruiz, Granada Conservatory).

#### *Social networks: comparison*

With regard to inclusion in social networks, Seville was the first center to open a Twitter profile, Jaén the Facebook and Granada the YouTube.

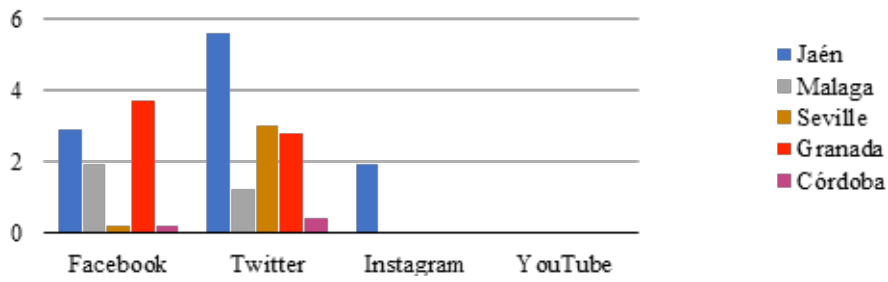
	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE
2009		Seville	
2010	Jaén		Granada
2011	Granada	Granada	Seville
2012	Malaga, Córdoba	Córdoba	
2013		Malaga	
2014			
2015			
2016		Jaén	Jaén
2017			
2018	Seville		

Table 4: Chronology of social networks creation

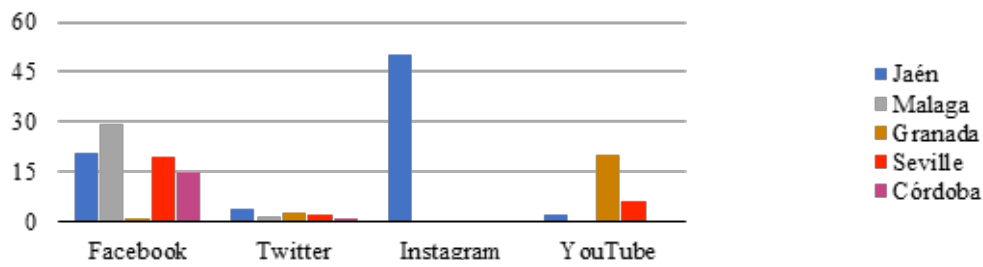
In relation to the development of these social networks, Twitter has the highest activity index, Instagram the highest number of likes and Facebook the highest number of shared information. The most commented information is on YouTube and Facebook.

The conservatories with more activity in social networks are: Granada on Facebook and Jaén on Twitter. These data are contemplated in Graphs 17, 18, 19 and 20.

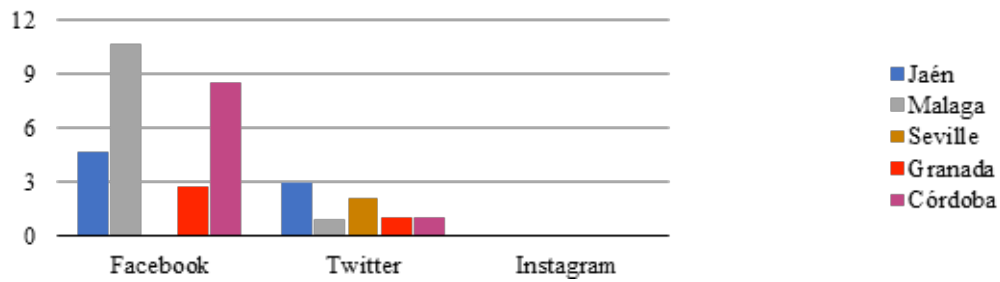




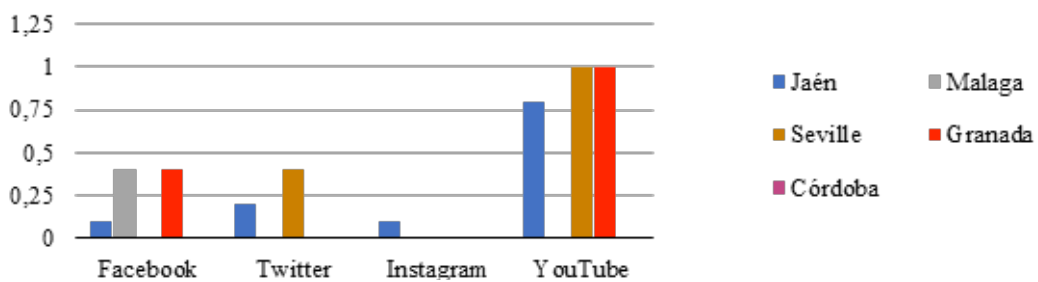
Graph 17: Comparison of social networks activity



Graph 18: Comparison of likes on social networks



Graph 19: Comparison of publications shared on social networks



Graph 20: Comparison of comments/answers on social networks

In addition to these indicators, the number of YouTube views is an approximate indicator of the reach of social networks, with an average of 3.200 views per post.

## COMMUNICATION ASSESSMENT

Andalusian higher conservatories of music consider that an important work is being carried out regarding the generation and promotion of local musical heritage. However, they recognize their limitations and the limited scope of their communication actions and propose numerous improvements, such as: the staff increase in management (Interviewed, Córdoba Conservatory); the acquisition of a person trained in communication (Israel López, Seville Conservatory); the integration in higher education (Francisco Martínez, Malaga Conservatory); and the increase in budget and research support (Celia Ruiz, Granada Conservatory).

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After the analysis of the results, the hypothesis is confirmed that within the higher conservatories of music there is an internal communication flow equivalent to that of any educational institution. However, its actions in the external field and its commitment to the musical cultural heritage turn these centers into paradigms that generate and preserve culture and art.

From this statement it is possible to establish the following conclusions:

1. Andalusian higher conservatories of music are long-standing historical institutions;
2. there is an internal commitment to education and the preservation of local heritage that is channeled mainly from the management in the form of downward communication;
3. numerous external actions are carried out in the local environment and have little impact;
4. in the Andalusian higher conservatories of music are aware of this situation and say they have no means to improve it.

Currently, those in charge of management know the historical past of the centers and promote a large number of open activities that reinforce educational aspects while serving advertising purposes from a social perspective.

In the context of carrying out these activities, from an internal point of view, numerous interviews (formal and informal) are conducted and information is shared with tools such as email or WhatsApp, in order to promote student and teaching staff involvement in the activities carried out.

From the external point of view, management coordinates all the activities with local entities, some of which are important diffusers of the conservatories, who can only advertise through their website and social networks.

If the communication actions of each of the centers are compared, it is also possible to establish some conclusions:

- the main projects of the Seville Conservatory take place outside its facilities because they do not have an auditorium (Israel López, Seville Conservatory); and Granada Conservatory claims to have a regular audience when it is located in a historic building (Celia Ruiz, Granada Conservatory);
- by consensus, the official website is the most complete means of information;
- the most used social networks are, in this order: Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and YouTube;

- the topics covered in the whole social and web networks of the center are: 30% concerts, 16% festivals, 11% master classes, 7% conferences, 7% courses, 6% employment, 6% contests, 5% news, 3% congratulations, 2% Erasmus, 1% journals;

As a general conclusion, it is possible to establish that the Andalusian higher conservatories of music need to develop specific communication plans that address their needs, although this requirement cannot currently be met due to budgetary constraints. Given this situation, it is possible to propose other improvements, such as teachers' training in communication tasks (internal and external) and/or establishment of a unified agency at the regional or state level that deals with the public relations of Andalusian higher conservatories of music.

Translation: Rosario Haro-Almansa and Guillermo van Zummeren-Moreno

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS STRATEGIES IN SOCIAL MEDIA: ANALYSIS OF CAMPAIGNS FOR SOCIAL CHANGE IN THE EDUCATION SECTOR IN SPAIN AND PORTUGAL**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The present paper discusses the use of social media when campaigning for social change in the education sector. The main focus is the analysis of the public relation strategies in use: the disclosure of real testimonials and the development of storytelling, as contents that enhance affinity and engagement towards social change. For the purpose of the analysis, two case studies were developed that discuss the campaigns of two non-governmental organizations in the educational sector, via social media: #LeonorDejaLaEscuela by Fundación Secretariado Gitano in Spain, from 2015, and #Amigo-Bagos-Douro by Bagos d'Ouro in Portugal, from 2017. The first one was implemented mainly on Twitter – one of the most well-known social network in use today –, while the other one used WhatsApp – the most popular mobile messenger –, as means of campaigning for broader access to education. The study aimed to answer the following research question: what is the role of social media in nonprofit organizations public relations strategies? This equation expressed two scientific objectives: (1<sup>st</sup>) to deepen the knowledge on the ability of social media to produce communicative interaction; and (2<sup>nd</sup>) to (re)frame public relations within communication for development strategies. The analysis demonstrates that social media have greatly contributed to change the way public relations strategies within the third sector are conducted. In fact, social media may play a key role in nonprofit communication: by lobbying for social causes, creating alliances, raising money, mobilizing volunteers, engaging traditional media and community relations, or by advocating for policy reform.

### **KEYWORDS**

public relations; social media; nonprofit organizations; education campaigns; social development; change

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# AS ESTRATÉGIAS DE RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS NOS MÉDIA SOCIAIS: ANÁLISE DE CAMPANHAS PARA A MUDANÇA SOCIAL NO SETOR DA EDUCAÇÃO EM ESPANHA E PORTUGAL

## RESUMO

O presente artigo discute o uso dos média sociais nas campanhas que visam promover a mudança social no setor da educação. O principal foco de análise é as estratégias de relações públicas utilizadas: a partilha de depoimentos reais e o desenvolvimento do *storytelling*, como conteúdos que aumentam a afinidade e o envolvimento com vista à mudança social. Para este trabalho foram desenvolvidos dois estudos de caso que debatem as campanhas de duas organizações não-governamentais do setor da educação, realizadas através de média sociais: #LeonoraDejaLaEscuela da Fundación Secretariado Gitano, em Espanha, em 2015, e #Amigo-Bagos-Douro da Bagos d'Ouro, em Portugal, em 2017. A primeira foi implementada, principalmente, no Twitter – uma das redes sociais mais conhecidas e usadas atualmente –, enquanto a segunda utilizou o WhatsApp – o sistema de mensagens móveis mais popular nos dias de hoje –, como meios de campanha para promover um acesso mais amplo à educação. Este estudo tem como objetivo responder à seguinte questão de partida: qual é o papel dos média sociais nas estratégias de relações públicas das organizações sem fins lucrativos? Trata-se de uma questão que exprime dois objetivos de pesquisa: (1.º) aprofundar o conhecimento sobre a capacidade das redes sociais produzirem interação comunicativa; e (2.º) (re)enquadrar as relações públicas nas estratégias da comunicação para o desenvolvimento. A análise demonstra como as redes sociais têm contribuído significativamente para alterar o modo como as estratégias de relações públicas são usadas no terceiro setor. Na verdade, os média sociais podem desempenhar um papel fundamental na comunicação sem fins lucrativos, nomeadamente cumprindo alguns propósitos: fazendo *lobbying* por causas sociais, criando alianças, angariando financiamento, mobilizando voluntários, envolvendo os média tradicionais e a comunidade, ou advogando pela reforma de políticas.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

relações públicas; redes sociais; organizações sem fins lucrativos;  
campanhas de educação; desenvolvimento social; mudança

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## INTRODUCTION

As stated by a wide literature, a well-defined public relations (PR) strategy combined with a social media story can significantly impact public opinion on a specific social cause. As so, this paper aims to describe two successful strategies on social media, developed by non-profit organizations (NGOs) in Spain and Portugal that have adopted innovative communication approaches through Twitter and WhatsApp.

PR strategies in social media seem to have a relatively high degree of effectiveness when implementing social campaigns as they enhance the formation of strong relationships with the stakeholders. Therefore, the third sector is increasingly applying this relational approach to persuasion campaigns on Facebook or Twitter, when trying to impact stakeholders' behaviours (Auger, 2013). However, the panorama of social media and mobile devices faces constant changes concerning PR, hence NGOs need to experience



new digital tools, technological solutions and mobile environments, in order to align themselves with the changes in citizens' behavioural media consumption.

The paper will discuss the use of social media when campaigning for social change in the education sector, through the analysis of the PR strategy in use: the disclosure of real testimonials and the development of storytelling, as contents that may enhance affinity and engagement towards social change among the publics. The analysis examines two case studies from the Iberian Peninsula, considering its common cultural similarities. As such, it discusses the social campaigns of two NGOs in the educational sector implemented via social media: #LeonorDejaLaEscuela by Fundación Secretariado Gitano in Spain, from 2015, and #Amigo-Bagos-Douro by Bagos d'Ouro Association in Portugal, from 2017. The first one was implemented on Twitter, one of the most well-known social networks in use today, and the other one used WhatsApp, the most popular mobile messenger, as means of campaigning for broader access to education.

This study aims to answer the following research question: what is the role of social media in non-profit organizations public relations strategies as innovative approaches to social campaigns? This scientific concern had two specific objectives: (1<sup>st</sup>) to deepen the knowledge on the ability of social media to produce communicative interaction and impact; and (2<sup>nd</sup>) to (re)frame public relations within communication for development strategies in the contemporary digital environments. In order to comply with these purposes, the study applies a model of analysis that combines interpretative hermeneutics, web mining and content analysis. The general context of the study and the results will be presented in the following sections.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND SOCIAL MEDIA IN NGO**

### **PUBLIC ENGAGEMENT IN SOCIAL CAUSES**

The widespread use of digital media is an undeniable trend in contemporary public relations strategies. Recognizing the value that social media provides for engaging specific publics, many organizations have “eagerly adopted and actively used social media as a part of their communication efforts” (Cho, Schweickart & Haase, 2014, p. 565). Among the most active social media users are non-profit organizations, which seem to far exceed for-profit organizations performance in this environment. Actually, social media offer numerous and creative opportunities for non-profit organizations to interact with their publics. Additionally, those media are adequate to their often-limited monetary resources (Cho et al., 2014; Curtis et al., 2010). However, the challenge seems to lay in establishing real interactive communication modes.

In the 1990's, a prominent period for the development of the WWW, Kent and Taylor (1998) presented a revealing study on how organizations can build relationships through the internet using two-way dialogic communication channels. They found out that, in fact, the internet was able to provide great opportunities to create organizational

relationships through dialogic mechanisms – at the time, comment forums and email. Since then, other dialogical channels have emerged, such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs or WhatsApp, that have challenged much of their thinking. However, Kent and Taylor (1998)'s basic principles of relationship building seem to remain valid: (a) to include useful information; (b) to frequently generate new content; (c) to make the platforms easy to use and navigate; and (d) to strive to keep publics connected (Briones, Kuch, Liu & Jin, 2011).

Yet, despite its potential benefit for public engagement, it seems that non-profit organizations use social media mainly for information diffusion as a complementary support to traditional media, rather than exploiting its interactive nature. In other words, as seen in many studies, non-profits' social media message strategies are still one-way communication, rather than a two-way symmetrical relation (Cho et al., 2014; Lovejoy, Waters & Saxton, 2012). These unidirectional persuasion models were studied by Auger (in 2013; for example), who explains how they can serve different purposes: in Twitter to provide appreciation and recognition; in Facebook to ask the stakeholders for feedback; and in YouTube to call authority figures to communicate key messages. Recently, researchers have added some references to messaging apps. They have suggested WhatsApp as the most popular one among young smartphone users, while fulfilling also organizational purposes, such as to connect, to share and to update information, or to monitor environments (Malka, Ariel & Avidar, 2015; Wright & Hinson, 2017). But still such investigations show the prevalence of the sender metaphor.

A study from Waters and Jamal (2011), for example, examines how non-profit organizations communicate on Twitter. Once again, the findings reveal that organizations are more likely to use one-way models even though the potential for dialogue and community building on those social networking sites. In fact, of the traditional public relations models, *public information* seems to be the most often used by non-profit organizations, followed by the *press agency*, the *two-way asymmetrical* and finally the *two-way symmetrical*. Moreover, according to Waters and Jamal (2011), the lack of conversation continues to dominate general PR practices, as research shows that the majority of contemporary organizations – non-profit, corporate and governmental – continue to avoid real interactivity and engagement on the internet.

Despite the conservative approach to social media demonstrated by NGOs, several studies reinforce the general belief that the use of such channels is beneficial to non-profit organizations for several reasons. Not only does it help deepen existing relationships, but it also allows individuals to self-organize around causes through collaborating with each other (Briones et al., 2011; Ciszek, 2015), in particular, because the nature of these media provides a normative approach to excellence in dealing with social issues (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002).

## **PRACTICES AND CHALLENGES IN NGOs COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES**

Today, most NGOs agree on the importance of digital media for public relations activities, although they express concerns on that matter. Seo, Kim and Yang (2009) identified the following doubts: reliability, message control, and the scope of online audiences. Most of the studied NGOs claimed that getting stories into the mainstream media is still very important because of the reputational effect. The publics do not always think of new media channels as being as reliable as well-known media. Additionally, message control remains an issue, as receivers are also content producers. And, according to the same researchers, these concerns can stop some NGOs from “more actively engaging in new media-based public relation activities” (Seo et al., 2009, p. 125).

Thus, perhaps because NGOs failed to overcome these apprehensions, new media usage seems to have limited influence on organizational efficiency and revenue, following Seo et al. (2009) research results. Moreover, NGOs might not have enough resources (human and monetary) to develop new means of communication (Seo et al., 2009), except those with defined public relations departments (Curtis et al., 2010).

In spite of these challenges, and according to Waters (2009), non-profit organizations predominantly use social media to streamline management functions, to educate the public about programs and services, and to communicate with stakeholders. Additionally, in order to work out the reliability issue, the use of influencers in social media strategies has become an increasingly common practice. Social media influencers represent a new type of independent third party endorser who shape audience attitudes through texts in blogs, tweets, or different contents in other social media (Freberg et al., 2011). An influencer is

a person who has a greater than average reach or impact through word of mouth in a relevant marketplace. Micro-influencers are not traditional celebrities, but rather individuals who work in their category [of products and services] or are truly knowledgeable, passionate and authentic, and are seen as a trusted source when it comes to recommendations.<sup>1</sup>

Thus, influencers have been identified in the literature as relevant options to integrate in public relations strategies. A relevant trend also found in NGOs practices.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The model of analysis used in this study is based on a triangulated approach in terms of techniques. It is grounded in the case study methodology and integrates several data gathering techniques, combining interpretative hermeneutics, web mining, non-participative observation and content analysis. Furthermore, the measurement techniques were adjusted to each case study, as WhatsApp and Twitter require specific procedures given their technical characteristics and use environments.

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from [http://go2.expertcity.com/rs/288-azs-731/images/expertcity-kellerfaysurveysummary\\_.pdf](http://go2.expertcity.com/rs/288-azs-731/images/expertcity-kellerfaysurveysummary_.pdf)

In order to estimate the potential of social media implementation regarding PR strategies in social campaigns, we have followed the PESO model by Bartholomew (2010), together with the AMEC framework (2013<sup>2</sup>; Table 1). Both include some proposals for PR campaigns measurement in social media on each stage of the communication campaign – exposure, engagement, influence, impact and advocacy –, to assess the effectiveness of shared, owned, and earned content in the campaigns.

	EXPOSURE	ENGAGEMENT	INFLUENCE	IMPACT	ADVOCACY
<b>Program metrics</b>	- Total OTS (opportunities to see) for program content	- Number of interactions with the content - Interaction rate - Hashtag usage	- Increase in the % of association with key attributes - Change in issue sentiment	- New subscribers - Referral traffic to website - White paper downloads	- Recommendation/total mentions
<b>Channel metrics</b>	- Number of itens - Mentions - Reach - Impressions CPM (cost per thousand)	- Post likes - Comments - Shares - Views - R Ts/1000 (retweets per thousand followers) - Followers	- Net promotion % by channel	- Unique visitors to website referred from each channel	- Organic posts by advocates - Ratings/reviews
<b>Business metrics</b>			- Purchase consideration % - Likelyhood to recommend % - Association with brand attributes	- Sales - Repeat sales - Purchase frequency - Cost savings - Number leads	- Employee - Ambassadors - Brand - Fans/advocates

Table 1: AMEC 2013 framework  
 Source: <https://amecorg.com/amecframework/>

The web mining retrieved the social media data for the Spanish social campaign only<sup>3</sup> by means of Twitter search (tweets from 2015)<sup>4</sup>. As a result, the 63 tweets published on the day of the campaign – 21<sup>st</sup> October 2015 – were selected due to its major interactivity index. The tweets are from the agency responsible for the campaign, the NGO, Ana Pastor (campaign’s media leader and influencer), citizens, institutions and media, in order to maximize the diversity of the publications in the sample.

The Portuguese campaign was assessed by means of non-participative observation, combined with other data collection methods (including document analysis sourcing the data directly from the NGOs management), to achieve a more “nuanced and dynamic” appreciation of situations that cannot be as easily captured through other methods (Liu & Maitlis, 2010, p. 4). For example, web mining WhatsApp by using specific monitoring software is not possible<sup>5</sup>. In 2014, WhatsApp and Open Whisper Systems partnered up

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://amecorg.com/amecframework/>

<sup>3</sup> WhatsApp is an encrypted network so web mining cannot be performed on this application.

<sup>4</sup> Twitter API restricts the access to the last 3.200 tweets or last year as a rule.

<sup>5</sup> WhatsApp’s end-to-end encrypted system facilitates privacy and security for all WhatsApp users (retrieved from <https://>

to make the messaging app a lot more secure by using a technique called end-to-end encryption, which basically locks incoming and outgoing messages so that only you and your recipient can see them<sup>6</sup>. However, the information provided by Bagos d'Ouro's coordinator, as well as the access to campaign messages and non-participative observation, sufficiently answered Bartholomew (2010) model (although partially).

In both campaigns, the content analysis embraces the research of messages, formats, hashtags, keywords, tools, channels and strategic approaches to PR, employed in these two campaigns, ranging from owned to earned and shared content. It also uses secondary data sources such as internal reports and documents of the campaigns and of the associations, their web pages and media publications, as well as email messages.

The analysis of the gathered data was performed by means of interpretative hermeneutics (interpretative phenomenological analysis), consisting of a qualitative analysis of verbal and non-verbal communication to capture the core sense of the messages. The approach allows us to put into perspective two different experiences in campaigning for social change and development, with the common denominator of social media use via interactive digital tools.

#### **CASE STUDIES PRESENTATION**

As previously mentioned, two campaigns developed in the Iberian Peninsula were chosen for this study, considering that this would be a valid social and communication framework for the analysis, given the similarities of the socio-cultural and technological context of both countries and for convenience of the research group (which involved the universities of Málaga – Spain and Minho – Portugal). The campaigns were created by two NGOs working on issues such as education, minorities and social exclusion: Fundación Secretariado Gitano from Spain, and Bagos d'Ouro from Portugal. We have selected the educational sector for its strategic importance in the development of both countries and because of raising concerns with issues as school abandonment, social exclusion and marginal neighbourhoods. Thus, the study examines two social campaigns in the educational sector developed via social media as the common technological denominator.

In Spain the campaign was #LeonorDejaLaEscuela, implemented mostly on Twitter (used mainly on mobiles – 80%, with 326 million users worldwide [Twitter Marketing, 2013]), but using also Facebook and YouTube (2015) as the support. Twitter presents a significant interactive and viral potential that can help to achieve a desired media impact while reaching politicians, journalists, activists and celebrities directly. The campaign from Portugal, called #Amigo-Bagos-Douro, was performed via WhatsApp (2017). Half of the Portuguese population is estimated to use social networks, with WhatsApp being the second in terms of penetration level (58%) (Marktest, 2019). WhatsApp is a

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[www.whatsapp.com/research/awards/](http://www.whatsapp.com/research/awards/)).

<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <https://cellphonetracker.net/read-whatsapp-messages/>

one-to-one communication channel with a micro-influencer basis, ideal to reach high levels of reliability, as well as message control. As it begins to be applied for non-profit uses, the study looks to comprehend this new phenomenon.

As means of campaigning for a broader access to education, both campaigns have used interactive tools and channels of digital communication, to fulfil their strategic objectives in two similar scenarios in the education sector, which nonetheless required two different approaches.

## **STUDY RESULTS**

### **#LEONORDEJALAESCUELA CAMPAIGN**

#LeonorDejaLaEscuela was a campaign launched on Twitter on 21<sup>st</sup> October in 2015. The campaign is framed within the education field (IV) of the work of Fundación Secretariado Gitano (FSG) and its main focus was to make the society sensitive to the issue of early school abandonment among Spanish gypsy children. FSG, according to its 2017 annual report, is an active and successful association that works in key areas of social inclusion for the gypsy community mainly in Spain, but also abroad.

The main target groups were the society and political powers, while the secondary publics comprise teachers, along with gypsy families and students. The activities involved impact actions on social networks, by means of hashtag and trending topics, videos (in Spanish and English), graphics (posters), leaflets and a microsite (laleonorreal.org), among others. Facebook, Youtube, Twitter and the website were the main channels of communication, with Twitter being chosen as the campaign's launching platform and main source for viral effect purposes.

#LeonorDejaLaEscuela was financed by IRPF Programme for Solidarity (Ministry of Health, Social Services and Equality), and by the Operational Programme for the European Social Fund and Social Inclusion. Additionally, it was supported by the Spanish Ministry of Education. QMS Communication/DDB Spain agency was responsible for the development of the creative idea of the campaign whose main goal was to raise awareness of school abandonment among young gypsies, and that resulted in significant media repercussion.

As a general approach, some strategic elements from the QMS Communication proposal can be identified (Figure 1).

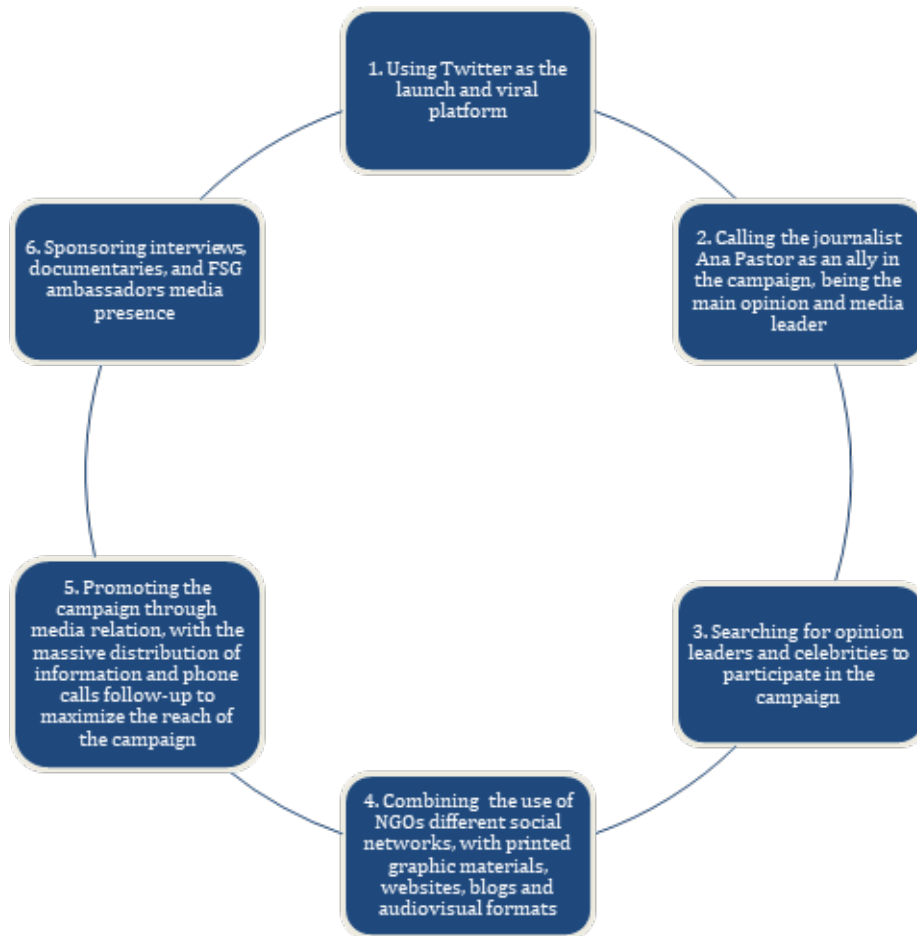


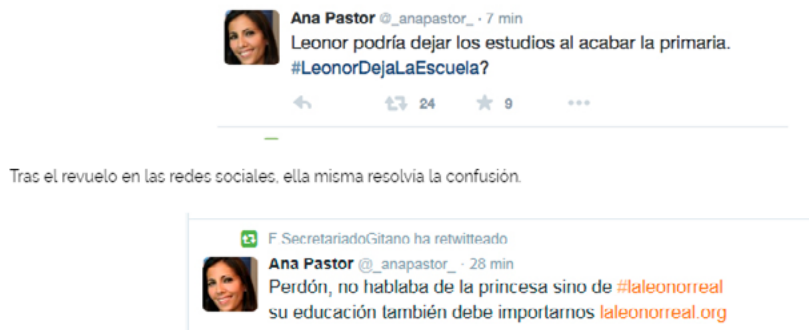
Figure 1: Campaign strategy design

Source: Own elaboration based on QMS' report (2016)

The campaign seeks to bring the so far invisible issue of gypsy school abandonment (involving 67% of the students in Spain) to the center of public debate and convert it into a matter of state. In order to make an impact and call the social and media attention, the campaign allied with the well-known and controversial Spanish journalist Ana Pastor, and involved the use of the name of Princess Leonor de Borbón<sup>7</sup>.

The actions planned and developed during the campaign (QMS Communication) involved two main stages: teaser and resolution. With the hashtag #LeonorDejaLaEscuela (#LeonorDropsOutOfSchool), Ana Pastor launched the campaign on Twitter with the following message: “Leonor might drop out of the primary school” (Figure 2).

<sup>7</sup> A member of the Spanish Royal Family and the future Queen of Spain.



Tras el revuelo en las redes sociales, ella misma resolvía la confusión.

Figure 2: Ana Pastor’s message

Source: <https://www.sensibilizaciongitanos.org/portfolio-posts/leonordejalaescuela/>

This tweet was followed by other Pastor’s publication, after a few hours of deliberate silence on Twitter, to create further interest and suspense. Since it provoked a lot of stir in both social and mass media (for the apparent allusion to Princess Leonor de Borbón), the journalist wrote another tweet that revealed the “real” heroine of the story: “sorry, I wasn’t talking about the Princess, but about #laleonorreal (#realleonor). Her education should also matter to us [www.laleonorreal.org](http://www.laleonorreal.org)”.

By the end of the morning, Leonor’s actual identity is revealed: it was a gypsy girl that wants to be a doctor in the future. The tweets that followed included a link to the campaign’s microsite and planned actions. The campaign applied diverse resources for maximizing media visibility, including informal channels, media storytelling approach and FSG’s own presentation, using attractive images and informative content, in English and Spanish, to guarantee the international coverage (Table 2). The strategic objectives were to provoke social interaction and thus raise awareness. As a result, the campaign successfully achieved both objectives.

<b>MEDIA RELATIONS</b>	Press release	Press kit
<b>ONLINE MEDIA</b>	Blog	Campaign microsite (responsive design)
<b>AUDIOVISUAL MATERIALS</b>	Videos	

Table 2: Campaign’s resources

The campaign also showed cultural proximity and positive examples on how to overcome different barriers in order to achieve the educational success, presenting some pioneers of change within the minority circles. They were called the “Gypsy ambassadors of education” and the videos told their stories (Figure 3). The microsite, developed to share the videos, explained the issue of gypsy school abandonment, offering solutions for institutions, society and families. It was a way to change the official communication into a more inspirational version. FSG’s main message to society was: “if they study, we all win”.



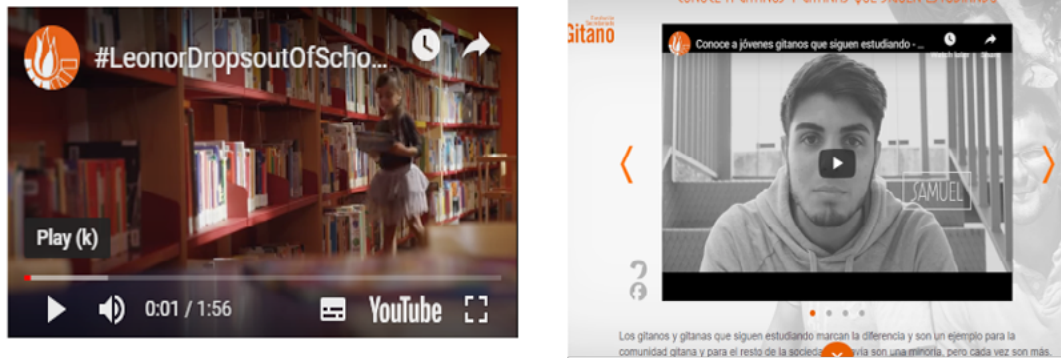


Figure 3: Examples of videos

Source: <https://www.sensibilizaciongitanos.org/portfolio-posts/leonordejalaescuela/>

The campaign's strategic approach aimed to demonstrate that the education of gypsy children should be treated with the utmost care and should be as important to society as of any other child's. The main hero here is not Princess Leonor, but these 60% of the children who leave school before even finishing the compulsory education, represented by #RealLeonor and her personal story. The kids' stories revealed their dreams and desired future jobs. It resonates with the campaign signature: "all the children shall have the right to fulfil their dreams" (Figure 4). As such, it highlights the main goal of the campaign: nobody shall be deprived of his or her dreams regardless to their social background. By improving their future employment, society avoids further social exclusions, which sooner or later will become a real matter of the state.

The campaign's message was clearly stated from the beginning and it was framed in two ideas by means of two hashtags in order to foment the viral effect:

1. #LeonorDejaLaEscuela – to call the attention of society that usually cares more for one popular person in a comfortable situation than other groups of underprivileged children; and
2. #LaLeonorReal – to highlight an issue that should be considered socially important: underprivileged children and the education for all.

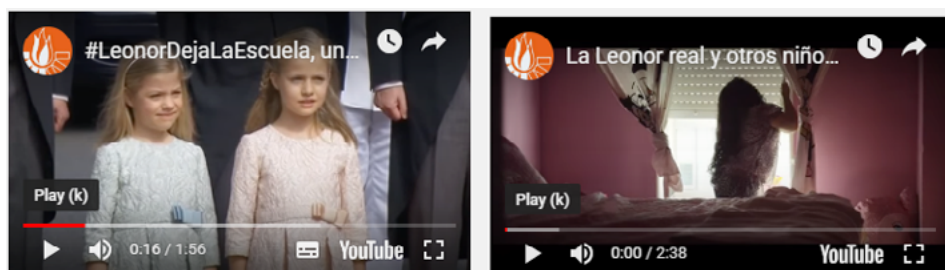


Figure 4: Video-storytelling

Source: <https://www.sensibilizaciongitanos.org/portfolio-posts/leonordejalaescuela/>

Therefore, the main goal of the campaign was to engage the whole society into gypsy kids' education, in order to transform their vulnerable situation, create equal

opportunities, and thus benefit the society as a whole. The communication objective was to give the maximum visibility and media repercussion to the campaign in online and of-line media. And the effects were substantial. The hashtag and tweet #LeonorDejaLaEscuela became a trending topic on the very same day of the campaign’s launch. The Ana Pastor’s (Figure 5) tweet reached 57 replies, 199 retweets, and 100 favorites.



Figure 5: Media reaction  
 Source: Twitter

Through the storytelling triangulation effect in different channels, Spanish media, journalists and celebrities, public institutions, including the monarchy and NGOs, together with Spanish companies and citizens, were all engaged in the campaign (something visible in user generated content, mainly memes; Table 3).

IMPACTS	PARTICIPATION IN CONVERSATION	CAMPAIGNS’ VIEWERS IN 24H (EL PAÍS)
20 mln	16 mln	15 mln

Table 3: Campaign’s impact on Twitter - viewers in 24h (El País)

The Twitter’s search results, by the hashtag #LeonorDejaLaEscuela, shows that it was there that the 63 publications with the greatest interaction were produced, the majority of which containing a video of the campaign and the link to the website, all of them including the hashtag (Table 4).

	REPLIES	RETWEETS	FAVOURITES	AVERAGE RT AND FAVOURITE
	188	1126	1109	18
TWEETS TYPE AMONG 63 MOST INTERACTED TWEETS	ORGANIC	OPINION LEADER ANA PASTOR		FSG
	56	3		4

Table 4: The impact of 63 mostly interacted tweets and their types

Media personality, proximity achieved through personalization, and dramatization seemed to be key factors of communication success and viral effect. The campaign was even largely visible in the major Spanish media (Table 5). *El País* newspaper, for example, published a special article dedicated to this issue and based on the campaign, encouraging the social debate, and highlighting some of the comments from the public.

TV	NEWSPAPER	ONLINE MEDIA	NGO AND SPECIALIZED SITES	INDUSTRY SITE
- La Sexta	- <i>El Diario Sur</i> - <i>El País</i> - <i>El Publico</i> - <i>El confidencial</i>	- Huffingtonpost.es	- Aulaintercultural.org - Educo Actúa, Plataforma de Infancia	- Controlpublicidad.com

Table 5: Media presence

According to QMS Communication agency's report, who was responsible for the campaign management, #LeonorDejaLaEscuela has achieved remarkable media impact (Table 6).

	APPEARANCES	AUDIENCE	MEDIA	ROI (RETURN ON INVESTMENT)
<b>Total</b>	143	38.144.283 mln	Radio/TV/newspaper/online	€ 684.274
<b>TV</b>	7	3.890.000	La Sexta Noticias, La 2 Noticias, Telecinco, TVE	€ 212.311
<b>Radio</b>	9	3.907.000	<i>Julia en la Onda</i> , <i>Esto me suena de RNE</i> , <i>Fin de semana Cadena COPE</i>	€ 112.166
<b>Online media</b>	117	29.296.283	No data	€ 306.317
<b>Printed media</b>	10 (nine publications)	1.051.000	No data	€ 53.483

Table 6: Media impact

As overall effect, the #LeonorDejaLaEscuela campaign and the agency received the "Bronze award for Public Relations" (Sol de Bronce) at the Sol – "Iberoamerican

Advertising Communication Festival” –, in 2016, the most important in Spain and Iberoamerica, and were awarded with the prize Fundación Princesa de Girona by the King of Spain in the same year.

In short, and taking as reference the aforementioned PR models for social media (Bartholomew, 2010; AMEC 2013<sup>8</sup>), we can state that the campaign achieved the desired effect of *exposure* mainly due to owned (videos, microsites, social accounts), shared (retweets) and earned media (media appearances; message delivery). Regarding *influence*, it has been mostly observed in terms of increase in public awareness on the issue (within media, institutions and citizens), in the earned content (associating the topic with FSG), and finally in owned media (with new modified attributions to gypsy community). Regarding *impact*, the issue gained, in fact, visibility in the media and within society, being the focus of debate in 15 million conversations online (on Twitter and including citizens, media, and others). As it can be observed, the campaign not only attained a high level of activity with limited resource (thanks to the strategically planned viral effect on Twitter), but also benefit from applying digital tools in a creative and interactive way (using influencers, ambassadors, digital storytelling, video formats, hashtags and trending topics), together with a more traditional media relations approach. It allowed the interaction and engagement of the public through a combined use of earned and shared media to leverage the media interest.

#### **#AMIGO-BAGOS-DOURO CAMPAIGN**

Bagos d’Ouro Association (ABO) is a nonprofit institution operating in a somewhat “paradoxical” area, the Douro region, in the north of Portugal. It is known for its historical and cultural value: as the oldest demarcated region in the world, as an Unesco World Heritage landscape, and for producing some of the most prestigious wines in the world, such as the famous Port wine. On the other hand, it simultaneously remains one of the poorest regions in Europe, characterized by a rural context with high poverty indicators, associated to other social risk factors, such as alcoholism, domestic violence and unemployment.

Recognizing this difficult context, Bagos d’Ouro (“Gold Berries”) was founded in 2010 with the main purpose of promoting the education of needed children and young people in the Douro region, as the means to enhance a more balanced society by contributing to social inclusion through education – the “most powerful weapon to change the World”<sup>9</sup>. Bagos d’Ouro Association promotes youth capacitation, through a long-term commitment, based on personalized interventions with each one of the children and young people they support, seeking to follow their educational, social and family journey towards full integration into an active life. Presently, ABO supports more than

<sup>8</sup> Retrieved from <https://amecorg.com/amecframework/>

<sup>9</sup> Retrieved from [www.bagosdouro.pt](http://www.bagosdouro.pt)

150 children and their families, reaching up around 300 beneficiaries. Accountability is a normal and valuable practice in this association since its foundation, contributing to brand loyalty and, more importantly, good reputation among donors.

#### **“AMIGO BAGOS D’OURO” FUNDRAISING PROGRAM**

ABO is not funded by the state, as it has always based its sustainability on fundraising actions among companies and individuals. The “Amigo Bagos d’Ouro” program – meaning literally “Gold Berries Friend” – is a fundraising program, born in the association’s second year of activity (2011). However, until the launch of an experimental campaign, in 2017, it never had a significant return. The campaign consisted of a strategy applied to WhatsApp mobile network.

In 2017, the ABO Board of Directors defined the fundraising program as a priority, to reinforce the fixed income of the association, by increasing the number of people or companies committed to their mission on a regular basis. As a result, the “Amigos Bagos d’Ouro” campaign was born. The use of the concept of “friend” aimed to bring people or companies closer to ABO’s mission, inviting them to financially support a child’s school career and, thus, help the family as well. In the messages shared, it was also made clear that the “donors-friends” are an essential support for ABO’s activity, since their contributions allow the association to establish a long-term commitment to each family.

The “Amigo” campaign was, then, released in November 2017, with a launch event in Lisbon, to which were invited the media and some public figures, with the purpose of generating issue awareness. However, there was no media impact. This first phase was followed by a campaign on ABO’s Facebook page – with public figures’ video testimonials. According to the Association’s general coordinator, Inês Taveira<sup>10</sup>, the campaign via WhatsApp has been more successful than the celebrities’ action and the Facebook posts, in terms of an effective increase in the number of donors.

The campaign was initially based on a WhatsApp group of five people from the Board of Directors that received the campaign contents and instructions to act as digital disseminators. Then, each one created a group among their known contacts in order to share several campaign messages. And afterwards the process developed itself in a “grapevine” model, that is, each person who received the message, shared it with other friends. Again, according to the association’s general coordinator, these personalized contacts and recommendations, as well as the easiness in forwarding and sharing the message with friends, were the key points of the WhatsApp campaign. The messages were about real stories of each child and young people supported by the association.

Considering our previously defined variables, as detailed in Table 1, micro-personalization and emotional discourse were the main rhetorical resources selected to reach a very particular, yet generous, target, through a group people highly involved with the

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<sup>10</sup> Email interview with the ABO’s general coordinator.

cause and the institution – the ABO’s Board of Directors. This group is actually composed of micro-influencers with special bonds to the Douro region, and willing to use their personal network for the donors’ campaign. Besides that, the campaign used personalized stories of Douro’s children and young people, sharing their dreams, what provided emotional bonds through communication waves (Table 7). In fact, storytelling is a strong communication option especially when it is reinforced by regular accountability. In the ABO’s case, that strategy is operationalized through a report sent by email to each donor, in a personalized tone, about the educational evolution of every supported child.

VARIABLE	ANALYSIS
<b>Messages and formats</b>	Personalize stories of each child or young person supported by the association sent by text messaging – no images or videos. Each text has the name of the beneficiary, its dreams to be accomplished and the monthly contribution needed to help that specific case. It also mentions how to donate and guarantees regular reports on his/her evolution.
<b>Keywords</b>	Persons’ name; dreams; supporting; school assignment; € 30; reporting; simplicity.
<b>Channels</b>	WhatsApp and website.
<b>Hashtags</b>	#amigo-bagos-douro
<b>Tools</b>	Personal WhatsApp contacts; official website; donors email.
<b>Strategic approach</b>	Testimonies gathering and copy writing for short messages; hyperlink to the official website at the end of texting for donation (commitment); personal stories sent one-by-one to ABO directors WhatsApp number, directors personal involvement and sharing; personalized emailing reports send to donators on a regular basis (loyalty).

Table 7: Bagos d’Ouro campaign: content analysis variables

Through several communication channels (detailed in Table 2), the simplicity of the process to participate in the campaign was disseminated and it seems to have been an important factor concerning effectiveness. After receiving the call-to-action message delivered by a friend, the potential donors could access ABO donors’ webpage directly, where they could find the instructions on how to act (Table 8<sup>11</sup>). Accountability is one of the most relevant techniques to guarantee a long-term relationship. If an emotional bond with a particular story is achieved, it is critical to maintain this link, as if it was someone as close as family.

<sup>11</sup> All internal and external data come from: an email interview to ABO general coordinator, 23<sup>th</sup> March 2019, and the 2018 Annual Financial Report, March 2019.

SOURCE	QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS
Official website	Specific donation page, explaining donors' options and providing payment forms in a simple and easy language (facilitation).
Internal and external reports	The internal budget for 2018 estimated € 22.200 as expected raising value. At the end of the year, donations reached € 49.753. This means an increase of more than 100%. Total of 43 "friends" raised through the campaign. 2018 Annual Reports dedicates two full pages to the campaign.
Emailing messages	The ABO team ensures accountability through regular reporting on the children's path, based on information collected by staff on the ground. It is send quarterly, according to school calendar (engagement).

Table 8: Interpretative hermeneutics

The results of the WhatsApp's social campaign surpassed the initial internal fundraising goals (Tables 2 and 3). The positive gap between predefined quantitative objectives and final results stresses the importance of trust and reliable sources as means to achieve engagement and lead to action, especially on messaging tools such as WhatsApp (Table 9). Many campaigns pursuing social causes achieve engagement, but the behavioural change is not achieved. In this case, the use of micro-influencers seems to be the key factor to obtain a high degree of effectiveness on this particular dimension.

<b>EXPOSURE</b>	Five senders have shared the campaign to an unknown number of people (personal contacts from their cell phones).
<b>ENGAGEMENT</b>	High level of potential engagement once it was a message sent by a friend, a "trustful source" (endorsement).
<b>INFLUENCE</b>	Micro-influencers shared personalized stories full of emotional content to a friend (reliability).
<b>PESO MODEL (ACTION IN PAID, EARNED, SHARED AND OWNED MEDIA)</b>	Owned media: € 59.823 (amount obtained in 2017 and 2018).

Table 9: WhatsApp monitoring

The ABO's case stresses the importance of building "safety networks" between the third sector and the donors, using reliable contents (true stories sent by someone we trust) and being accountable. In general, WhatsApp features, as an encrypted social media mobile messaging service, gives consistency to this strategy. Concerning long-term effects, those strategic options can lead to an increase on brand reputation as well as on loyalty. Also, it can help building "safety nets", or expressive strong bonds with the

most important stakeholders, reducing reputational risks (using Fombrun, Gardberg & Barnett, 2000, concept). However, the case study also highlights certain problems that can arise from using this social network: (1) strong dependency on the senders' goodwill, as well as their personal reputation; and (2) impossibility of measuring the number of messages sent by each member, as well as the number of shares from the moment the recipient receives it.

In sum, results are encouraging, since this digital pilot action doubled the expected results in quantitative terms, validating WhatsApp as a reliable channel for the third sector. Financial incomes appear not to be very high, however, as pointed by Fombrun et al. (2000, p. 106): "a consistent and sustained message requires continuous investment in and commitment to citizenship activities, despite the difficulty in directly quantifying the gains". In fact, the use of WhatsApp has proved to be a useful tool to Bagos d'Ouro Association. As well, the mobile messenger service proved to be a mean of campaigning for a broader access to education. However, the case shows that this social network does not allow scaling up a fundraising strategy, as we concluded by the quantitative results obtained.

## **DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The analysis clearly demonstrates that social media have greatly contributed in a positive manner to the way public relations strategies within the third sector are conducted. Social media can have a key role in non-profit communication by lobbying for social causes, creating alliances, raising money, mobilizing volunteers, engaging traditional media and community relations, or for advocating for policy reform. However, there is not a single model to develop these campaigns. As in traditional PR, it depends on the issue, the goals and the targets.

#LeonorDejaLaEscuela and #Amigo-Bagos-Douro are two very successful social campaigns within the educational sector, implemented via social media, but with very different scales and interaction levels. This leads to the conclusion that the public relations two-way asymmetrical model, as the ideal communication practice between an organization and its publics, cannot be seen as the only way to succeed. In fact, the Spanish case study, using Twitter, Facebook and YouTube, is an example of success supported by the high interactive level reached (moving away from the trends suggested in our literature review). Nevertheless, the Portuguese case study, using WhatsApp, shows how low interaction can become equally effective. In general, what the two campaigns have in common is the combination of the following communication strategies in social media: (1) the use of storytelling to promote emotional engagement; (2) the personalization of contents to increase impact; (3) the focus on the viral effect to reach targets; (4) the use of influencers (or micro-influencers) to enhance engagement; (5) the establishment the "safety nets", among stakeholders, to develop activism and brand loyalty; (6)



the triangulated effect by exploring media visibility; and (7) the development of original and creative ideas to stimulate awareness.

As regards to the first specific objective of this study, the Iberian context helped better understanding the innovative use of social media in PR campaigns. In both cases, social media made possible a more direct or personalised interaction with those participating in the campaign, via content and direct communication. As such, the advocacy effect and the action on social causes were fomented. Regarding the second objective, both campaigns are clear examples of the re-framing of PR communications throughout the use of social networks that in turn are able to increase media and social impact. The use of digital tools framed the communication for a more direct and personal approach with a high level of interactions that successfully drive PR from a mere exposure stage to a participative, content creation and user-based perspective. It is a strong proof of the value of re-framing from owned and paid content in mass media to earned and shared content, co-generated by diverse publics feeling engaged with the cause and purpose of the campaign. Through this renewed positioning, public relations can play an important role in the communication for development mix, as a driving force for societal challenges.

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## **THE COMMUNICATION ROLE: THE USE OF SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES IN PRIMARY HEALTH CARE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

It is well known that the growth of users on social networking sites has forced many institutions to consider the relevance of this communication channel. However, nothing is known about the use of social networking sites by the ACeS – Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde, public services integrated in the Portuguese health service (Serviço Nacional de Saúde [SNS]), whose mission is to provide primary health care, the health's promotion and disease's prevention as well as the connection to other services for the continuity of healthcare. At the time of its creation, in 2008, the government recognized that primary health care is the central pillar of the health system. It is argued in this study that communication should be oriented towards fulfilling the mission of the institutions. In this way, it is intended to understand how the communication process by these SNS institutions, particularly those that use social networking sites, is contributing to the fulfilment of their organisational missions. The objectives of this study were to identify the ACeS that are present on Facebook and to analyze the communication that has been developed there. The corpus of analysis consisted of the universe of all the ACeS existing in Portugal. The sources of our data were all public publications on the ACeS Facebook pages in 2018. For the systematic analysis of the data (analysis of the manifest messages), it was used the method of content analysis both with a quantitative and qualitative nature.

### **KEYWORDS**

communication; public relations; health promotion; primary health care; agrupamentos de centros de saúde

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## **O PAPEL DA COMUNICAÇÃO: A UTILIZAÇÃO DAS REDES SOCIAIS NOS CUIDADOS DE SAÚDE PRIMÁRIOS**

### **RESUMO**

Sabe-se que o crescimento dos utilizadores das redes sociais obrigou muitas instituições a considerar a relevância deste canal de comunicação. Nada se sabe, contudo, sobre a utilização das redes sociais pelos ACeS – Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde, serviços públicos integrados no Serviço Nacional de Saúde (SNS), que têm por missão a prestação de cuidados de saúde primários, a promoção da saúde e prevenção da doença e a ligação a outros serviços para a continuidade dos cuidados. No ato da sua criação, em 2008, o governo reconheceu que os cuidados de saúde primários são o pilar central do sistema de saúde. Defende-se, neste estudo, que a comunicação deve estar orientada para o cumprimento da missão das instituições. Deste modo,

pretende-se perceber de que forma a comunicação desenvolvida por estas instituições do SNS, particularmente a que recorre às redes sociais, está a contribuir para o cumprimento das suas missões organizacionais. Os objetivos deste estudo foram identificar os ACeS que estão presentes no Facebook e analisar a comunicação que aí tem sido desenvolvida. O *corpus* de análise foi constituído pelo universo de todos os ACeS existentes em Portugal. As fontes dos nossos dados foram todas as publicações públicas nas páginas de Facebook dos ACeS em 2018. Para a análise sistemática dos dados (análise das mensagens manifestas), utilizou-se o método de análise de conteúdo tanto com cariz quantitativo como qualitativo.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

comunicação; relações públicas; promoção da saúde; cuidados de saúde primários; agrupamentos de centros de saúde

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## INTRODUCTION

The development of the internet<sup>1</sup> and the accelerated growth of social networks<sup>2</sup> have allowed the emergence of different communication platforms. Today, organisations communicate regularly with their audiences, using the internet, through one-to-one (email), one-to-many (website) and many-to-many (social networks) communication (Avidar, 2017).

For public relations professionals (PR), this new phase of communication should be seen as an opportunity, as the environment is more conducive to interactions and relationships development (Solis & Breakenridge, 2009). Thus, if the internet is based on the exchange of information (Phillips & Young, 2009), PR practitioners are asked, however, not only to inform but also to build relationships.

Even so, the PR function remains the same, that of seeking the fulfillment of organization's mission and objectives, as Jane Wilson (2012) argues, the practice of public relations cannot be thought independently from the change and the evolution of the communication context.

Since the trend will be for internet users to increase (in Portugal the growth rate is around 3,7%<sup>3</sup>), and since the use of social networking sites<sup>4</sup>, and more specifically Facebook<sup>5</sup>, follows this evolution, the potential of these new communication channels for health promotion and disease prevention cannot be omitted (Eng, Maxfield, Patrick, Deering, Ratzan & Gustafson, 1998).

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<sup>1</sup> According to Internet World Stats data, about 4.346.561.853 people around the world access the internet, which is equivalent to 56,1% of the world's population (information regarding 2019 retrieved from <https://www.internetworldstats.com>).

<sup>2</sup> For a definition of various terms related to social media see Phillips and Young (2009, pp. 10-22).

<sup>3</sup> Data for the period from January 2018 to January 2019 (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019). In the period from January 2017 to January 2018, the growth rate of internet users in Portugal was 7% (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> In Portugal, 65% of the population is actively on social networking sites, where they spend around 2h09m daily (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019).

<sup>5</sup> According to the 2019 Hootsuite Digital report (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019), 90% of internet users in Portugal are on Facebook, the social network with the highest number of users.

Thus, with these new channels, there are more opportunities to communicate health (Moorhead, Hazlett, Harrison, Carroll, Irwin & Hoving, 2013) and to positively influence people's behavior on a larger scale (Austin, 2012).

This study aims to understand the use of Facebook by Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS) in the process of communicating with their audiences and to reflect on the contribution of this channel to the fulfilment of their organisational missions (Bryson, 2016, p. 247), i.e., to health promotion and disease prevention.

## **PUBLIC RELATIONS AND HEALTH COMMUNICATION**

The concept of health can be described as “a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization, 1998, p. 1).

In Portugal, the government has ensured the right to health protection through the portuguese health service (Serviço Nacional de Saúde [SNS]) since 1979. The SNS includes all health care services from promotion and surveillance to disease prevention, diagnosis, treatment and medical and social rehabilitation (Decree Law no. 56/1979).

The government also recognises that primary health care<sup>6</sup> is the central pillar of the health system and in order to increase citizens' access to health care, in 2008, it created the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS), public services with administrative autonomy, consisting of several functional units, in different geographic areas (Decree Law no. 28/2008).

Within the SNS, as part of their organisational missions, the ACeS are responsible for the development of health promotion<sup>7</sup> and disease prevention<sup>8</sup> activities, as well as the provision of primary health care and links to other services for the continuity of care (Decree Law no. 28/2008).

This article argues that the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde should use communication to fulfil their mission, i.e. to promote health and disease prevention.

It is also argued that the use of communication should be the responsibility of a public relations practitioner. Therefore, the use of communication is considered in its strategic vision, which is seen as a function that contributes to the achievement of the objectives and to the fulfilment of the organisational mission (Eiró-Gomes & Nunes, 2013), and specially as a way to promote change.

In this way, educating their audiences, leading them to the course of change can be one of the objectives of public relations (Lesley, 1997). As Nunes (2011) expressed “it is

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<sup>6</sup> For the World Health Organization (1998), primary health care can be defined as “essential health care made accessible at a cost a country and community can afford, with methods that are practical, scientifically sound and socially acceptable” (p. 3).

<sup>7</sup> Health promotion is the process of increasing people's ability to control their health in order to improve it. This process goes beyond the focus on individual behavior to a wide range of social, economic and environmental interventions, as described by the World Health Organization (1998).

<sup>8</sup> Disease prevention is considered an action aimed at individuals and populations with identifiable risk factors, often associated with different risk behaviors (World Health Organization, 1998).

increasingly important for PRs that their focus is truly placed on publics, finding effective ways to empower them so they can themselves be the authors of change” (p. 53).

And it is from this concept that the notion of health communication is reached, which due to its multifaceted and multidisciplinary approach (Schiavo, 2007) can contribute to health promotion and disease prevention, by influencing a change in behaviors and attitudes, both at an individual and at a community level.

Thus, health communication is much more than the transmission of information. As described by the Jonh Hopkins Center for Communication Programs, it is a contribution to change, it is a field in motion (Piotrow, Rimon, Payne Merritt & Saffitz, 2003).

One of the privileged health communication channels for the dissemination of information to the population is the internet/social networking sites (Berry, 2007) and its use by patients for health-related reasons is growing (Smailhodzic, Hooijsma, Boonstra & Langley, 2016; Van De Belt, Berben, Samson, Engelen & Schoonhoven, 2012). As Asano (2017) described, a person currently spends more time on social networking sites than eating, drinking or socializing.

With social networking sites, people go from being passive readers to having a role in the information dissemination process (Breakenridge, 2008), to sharing ideas, contents, thoughts and establishing relationships. In this medium, anyone can create, download or share content (Siapera, 2018), whether in text, sound, video or image (Scott, 2009).

The main benefits of using social networking sites were identified in a more comprehensive survey that analysed 98 studies published between 2002 and 2012: (1) increasing interactions with others; (2) more available, shared and adapted information; (3) increasing accessibility and widening access to health information; (4) social/emotional support; (5) public health surveillance; and (6) possibility to influence health policy (Moorhead et al., 2013).

Social networking sites are also an opportunity for organizations to foster dialogical communication and build relationships with their main audiences (Cho & Schweickart, 2015). For Joel Postman (2009) there are six attributes that make social networks a powerful tool for organizations to communicate: “authenticity, transparency, immediacy, participation, connectivity, responsibility” (p. 8). They also enable “accessible, fast and direct” communication (Mundy, 2017, p. 255) between an organisation and their stakeholders.

Breakenridge (2008) points out that there is an expansion in the number of communication channels (one-to-one, one-to-many, and now many-to-many) and with social media, public relations must focus, more than ever, on people so they can follow the “conversation” (p. 79).

Grunig (2009) argues that social networking sites play a crucial role in public relations practices such as reaching global audiences, implementing two-way symmetrical communication and building relationships with others.



In fact, the truth is that the use of social networking sites, and specifically Facebook<sup>9</sup> by people and organizations is increasing<sup>10</sup>. Facebook is one of the most popular communication platforms. It is estimated that it has around 1,52 billion active users daily, which represents a growth of 9% per year<sup>11</sup>. Its potential in health communication has been recognized by several academic studies (Burton, Henderson, Hill, Graham & Nadarynski, 2019; Gold, et al., 2011; Woolley & Peterson, 2012). Enrico Coiera (2003) argues that Facebook has the potential to change not only the way health care is provided, but also the way some diseases are treated.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

### PROCEDURES FOR DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

This work is based on a pragmatic research paradigm. This view of the world is characterized by the concern with the application of research results and the freedom of choice on the part of researchers about the research procedures (qualitatives or quantitatives) that best suit their objectives.

It is considered an exploratory study, since there is no research on this topic so far; and descriptive<sup>12</sup>, as it aims to analyze and characterize the communication developed by the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS) in the year 2018, on their Facebook pages.

Thus, the target population of this study consisted of the universe of all ACeS existing in Portugal, according to the indications on the website of the Portuguese Ministry of Health (totaling 55 ACeS)<sup>13</sup>, with publications visible on its Facebook page (active at the time of the study), in the period from January to December 2018.

In data collection, in order to map the ACeS present on Facebook, an initial search was carried out on the search engine of this social networking sites for the terms “ACeS”, “Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde” and the full name of the ACeS, in order to identify the respective pages. This survey was conducted in February 2019 by two different Facebook accounts in two different browsers, since the Facebook search box adapts what is found according to previous surveys.

A total of 17 references were found on Facebook, eight were included in the study (Table 1) and nine were excluded (Table 2). Two ACeS have a personal profile and therefore these profiles were excluded from the study due to Facebook’s policy to prohibit the

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<sup>9</sup> Facebook can be defined as a social networking service (also social networking site) or a micro website that allows people to share interactive content between a network of friends (Phillips & Young, 2009, p. 26). Founded in 2004, Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to build a community and bring the world closer together. People use Facebook to stay in touch with friends and family, to find out what’s happening in the world, and to share and express what’s important to them (retrieved from <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>).

<sup>10</sup> According to Facebook, 16 million company pages were created in May 2013, which represents an increase of 100% in relation to the eight million in June 2012 (retrieved from <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>).

<sup>11</sup> Retrieved from <https://newsroom.fb.com/company-info/>

<sup>12</sup> Descriptive studies aim to “name, classify, describe a population or conceptualize a situation” (Fortin, 2003, p. 138).

<sup>13</sup> Retrieved from <https://www.sns.gov.pt/institucional/entidades-de-saude/>

use of personal profiles by companies<sup>14</sup>. Four ACeS present unpublished pages in 2018 and for this reason were not included in the study. The Núcleo de Internos do ACeS Cávado II Gerês/Cabreira page, despite having 20 publications visible in 2018, has been inactive since September 25 of this year and for this reason was excluded from this project. The ACeS Cávado I - Braga has two pages on Facebook, one active, included in this study, and one inactive since 2013.

NAME OF ACeS	FACEBOOK PAGE URL
ACeS Central Alentejo	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Unidade-de-Sa%C3%BAde-P%C3%BAblica-do-ACES-Alentejo-Central-744998819025032/">https://www.facebook.com/Unidade-de-Sa%C3%BAde-P%C3%BAblica-do-ACES-Alentejo-Central-744998819025032/</a>
ACeS Cávado I – Braga	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/acesbraga/">https://www.facebook.com/acesbraga/</a>
ACeS Entre Douro e Vouga II Aveiro Norte	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/acesedvan/">https://www.facebook.com/acesedvan/</a>
ACeS Douro Norte	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/acesdouronorte/">https://www.facebook.com/acesdouronorte/</a>
ACeS Douro Sul	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ACES-Douro-Sul-1222608187806280/">https://www.facebook.com/ACES-Douro-Sul-1222608187806280/</a>
ACeS Grande Porto – Santo Tirso/Trofa	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/aces.santotirso.trofa/">https://www.facebook.com/aces.santotirso.trofa/</a>
ACeS Oeste Norte	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ArslvtAcesOesteNorteGabineteDoCidadao/">https://www.facebook.com/ArslvtAcesOesteNorteGabineteDoCidadao/</a>
ACeS Porto Ocidental	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/acesportoocidental/">https://www.facebook.com/acesportoocidental/</a>

Table 1: References included in the study

NAME OF ACeS	FACEBOOK PAGE URL	REASON FOR EXCLUSION
ACeS Aveiro Norte	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009229432144">https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100009229432144</a>	Friends profile page
ACeS Cávado II Gerês/Cabreira	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/N%C3%BAcleo-de-Internos-ACES-C%C3%A1vado-II-Ger%C3%AAsCabreira-573319813048166/">https://www.facebook.com/N%C3%BAcleo-de-Internos-ACES-C%C3%A1vado-II-Ger%C3%AAsCabreira-573319813048166/</a>	Inactive since September 25, 2018
ACeS Cávado I Braga	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ACES-C%C3%A1vado-I-Braga-352543148185635/">https://www.facebook.com/ACES-C%C3%A1vado-I-Braga-352543148185635/</a>	Inactive since May 31, 2013
ACeS do Sotavento Algarvio	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ACES.Sotavento/">https://www.facebook.com/ACES.Sotavento/</a>	No publications in 2018
ACeS Lisboa Ocidental e Oeiras	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/aceslxocidoeirass/">https://www.facebook.com/aceslxocidoeirass/</a>	No publications in 2018
ACeS Oeiras	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/UCC-Sa%C3%BAdar-ACES-Oeiras-219363191420148/">https://www.facebook.com/UCC-Sa%C3%BAdar-ACES-Oeiras-219363191420148/</a>	No publications in 2018
ACeS Oeste Norte	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Gabinete-do-Cidad%C3%A3o-Aces-Oeste-Norte-276486009164526/">https://www.facebook.com/Gabinete-do-Cidad%C3%A3o-Aces-Oeste-Norte-276486009164526/</a>	No publications in 2018

<sup>14</sup> For the difference between a page and a profile see <https://www.facebook.com/help/337881706729661>

ACeS Oeste Sul	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/ljornadasurapoestesul/">https://www.facebook.com/ljornadasurapoestesul/</a>	No publications in 2018
ACeS Porto Ocidental	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/aces.portoocidental.g8">https://www.facebook.com/aces.portoocidental.g8</a>	Friends profile page

Table 2: References excluded from the study

After selecting the pages to be included in this study, data were collected using the observation method that allows “documenting activities, behaviors and physical characteristics without having to depend on the will and capacity of third parties” (Coutinho, 2018, p. 136), i.e., the researchers themselves directly collect the information (Quivy & Campenhoudt, 2017).

In a first phase, a descriptive analysis of the general characteristics of the Facebook pages included in the research was carried out, taking into account the following topics:

- page name: ACeS identification on the Facebook page;
- page creation: date the page was created;
- profile photo: type of photo present in the profile, if logo or other chosen photo;
- description: identification of the ACeS description in the “about” tab of the page;
- mission: identification of the ACeS mission in the “about” tab of the page;
- events: identification of the events created in the “events” tab of the page;
- followers: current number of followers on the page;
- reviews and/or recommendations made on the page in a visible manner;
- rating: average score given by the user to the page, from one to five stars.

In order to capture all the publications on the Facebook pages of the ACeS under study, we used Netvizz 1.6<sup>15</sup>, a research tool developed by the Digital Methods Initiative laboratories, which aims to obtain information from Facebook pages and groups (Umair, Nanda & He, 2017). The application runs directly on Facebook and allows, through the “Page Data” module, to gather in a list all posts and comments published either by the pages or by other users, with their access links. For this research we extracted 2.042 publications (including 16 visitor publications on the pages) and 153 comments.

After the data collection, following Michaelson and Stacks (2017) we decided to proceed with a simple content analysis of the manifest messages and identified each publication and each comment, whether posted by the page or by its visitors, as a unit of analysis. Thus, this research focused on 2.195 units of analysis.

The data were analyzed according to the following dimensions, categories and sub-categories.

#### *ACeS activity on Facebook:*

- authorship: identification of whether the content was created by ACeS or is shared content from another entity Facebook page or from an external website;

<sup>15</sup> Available at <https://apps.facebook.com/107036545989762/>

- publication type: identification of whether the main content of the publication is solely text; an image and/or photo; a video or a link that forwards to a website external to Facebook;
- theme of the publication: identification of the main subject of the publication (data-drive strategy):
  - ephemerides: publications that mark commemorative dates such as World Food Day (October 16) and events/initiatives related to the celebrations of these days such as screenings on World Aids Day (December 01) and lectures on World Oral Health Day (March 20). All publications that mention the words “in the context of World Day celebrations...” or “to mark World Day”, i.e. whenever there is specific reference to the world or national day being marked, are included. Also included are commemorative dates such as European HIV-Hepatitis Test Week 2018 and Antibiotic Month;
  - health promotion/disease prevention: publications whose content encourages the improvement of health or the adoption of behaviours that prevent the disease, as long as they are not inserted in ephemerides or commemorations of world or national days, such as general recommendations for the population on winter food; call for vaccination against influenza; care on very hot days and/or promotion of physical activity;
  - studies: publications whose main content is related to scientific studies and investigations such as “there is lack of brains there is no other way to say it. Neuroscientists need brain tissue to study diseases that affect more than 15% of the world’s population” or “nutrition researchers are constantly scrutinising the health benefits of food”. All publications with references to words such as “study”, “survey”, “research”, “research”, “researchers”, “scientists” are inserted;
  - events: publications that refer to initiatives or events, as long as they are not related to the celebrations of the anniversaries:
    - ACeS events: publications mentioning initiatives (such as lectures, conferences, congresses, training sessions, meetings) promoted by the ACeS, announcement of dates, programme, registration and/or sharing of photographs;
    - events of other institutions: publications that mention initiatives promoted by other institutions (such as lectures, conferences, congresses, trainings, meetings), announcement of dates, program, registration and/or sharing of photographs. There is no direct participation of ACeS;
  - news: publications with an informative character:
    - ACeS news: publications related to opening hours, hiring of professionals, compliments to the team, contacts, good wishes and/or new services available at ACeS. Also included are publications about ACeS newsletters/information bulletins. Publications related to ephemerides, events and studies are excluded;
    - mass media news: publications that share news published in the media and that are neither related to ephemerides nor to events or studies;
  - participation in the mass media: publications that publicise the presence of the ACeS in interviews in the media or that share the image of the news already published. Example: “Canal Saúde+ interview about the +sports project” or “in the next hour we will be on air at Radio Telefonía do Alentejo... Come with us!”;
  - general information: publications related to useful information addressed to the user, but not promoted by ACeS, such as the MySns portal, paperless examinations, reporting of adverse drug reactions;
  - other: publications updating profile photo and/or cover photo of the ACeS, and others that are not integrated in the above.

### *User interaction with other pages/entities:*

- source: origin of publications shared by ACeS:
  - type of sharing:
    - Facebook: publications shared by ACeS from other Facebook pages;
    - websites: publications shared by ACeS from a website external to Facebook;
  - entity/institution:
    - Facebook: entity or institution mentioned as the main source of publication shared through another Facebook page;
    - websites: entity or institution mentioned as the main source of the shared publication through a website.

### *Interaction of users with the ACeS Facebook pages:*

- interaction: publications with reactions made by your followers. On Facebook interaction is considered as the use of the available options to show interest: “like”, “comment” and “sharing”;
- reaction type:
  - like: publications on the ACeS website that have received a “like” from their users;
  - share: publications on the ACeS website that have been shared by its followers;
  - comments: publications that registered a response:
    - authorship: origin or source of the comment, if made by the ACeS itself or by a follower;
    - content: classification of comments in terms of content:
      - positive: compliments in general; interaction with ACeS, e.g. greetings such as good morning, good night, good weekend; identification in the publication of another user, by marking a name, accompanied by a positive comment. Example: “and we have an Intensive Support Consultation for Smoking Cessation in the 3 municipalities of our ACES”;
      - neutral: manifestations not related to the subject; identification in the publication of another user, through the marking of a name, without any comment;
      - negative: comments hidden from the chronology; expressions of dissatisfaction, indignation and/or complaint; identification in the publication of another user, through the marking of a name, with negative comment. Example: “THESE ARE JUST LIES”.

For the treatment of the data, an analysis grid were elaborated in an Excel database, where the publications and comments were included. For the treatment of the results, charts and graphs were made based on simple statistical operations, performed in the Excel program.

## **PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF RESULTS**

Of the 55 Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS) that currently exist in the SNS, only eight provide an active Facebook page with publications in 2018, which represents around 15%.

The entry of these institutions, created from 2008, in this social network, can be considered late, since the first Facebook page appeared on 29 June 2012, by ACeS Porto Ocidental. The following year, the ACeS Oeste Norte page was created on January 08.

The last page to be created was that of the Unidade de Saúde Pública do ACeS Alentejo Central, on 3 January 2018.

The different pages do not follow a standard nomenclature, ranging from the full name of the entity (e.g. Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde Cávado I - Braga) to the abbreviation of the word Agrupamento de Centros de Saúde (e.g. ACES Douro Sul), and the inclusion of the Regional Health Administration to which ACeS belongs (e.g. ARSLVT ACES Oeste Norte - Gabinete do Cidadão).

The logo is the profile photo chosen on all the pages analyzed, with the exception of ACeS Oeste Norte which presents a photo of its facilities.

Page descriptions available on the “about” tab of the respective Facebook page are brief (e.g. “Agrupamento de Centros de Saúde do Porto Ocidental” or “Agrupamento de Centros de Saúde de Entre Douro e Vouga de Aveiro Norte”).

It is important to note that only three ACeS present their mission on the respective page of the social network under study (Table 3).

FACEBOOK PAGE NAME	MISSION (ABOUT)
ACeS Porto Ocidental	ACeS Porto Ocidental seeks to guarantee the citizens of its area of influence access to quality primary health care and to obtain health gains.
ACES Entre Douro e Vouga II Aveiro Norte	The Agrupamento de Centros de Saúde de Entre Douro e Vouga II - Aveiro Norte (ACeS Aveiro Norte) aims to be represented by a group of professionals motivated to improve the quality of health of the population that includes, through health promotion, disease prevention and care provision.
ACES Douro Norte	Guarantee the provision of primary health care to the population in its geographical area, seeking to maintain the principles of equity and solidarity, so that all population groups equally share the scientific and technological advances made in the service of health and well-being.

Table 3: Mission of ACeS Facebook pages

In 2018, ACeS did not register any events in the tab that Facebook provides for that purpose.

On the other hand, in the Facebook tab for criticism, we found three criticisms/recommendations on the pages of the Unidade de Saúde Pública do Alentejo e ACeS Grande Porto (Figure 1).

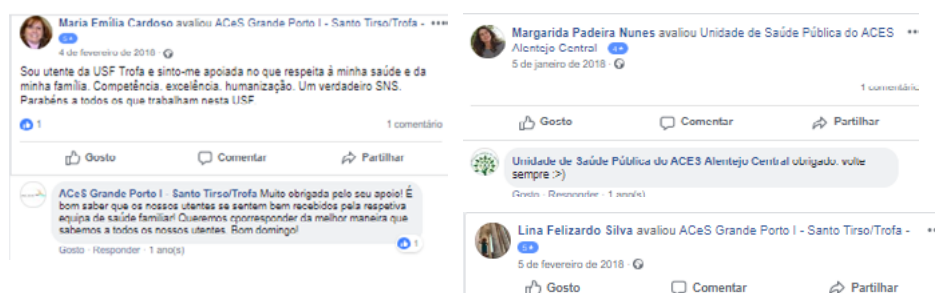


Figure 1: Criticisms/recommendations on the pages of the ACeS under study

The average rating given to pages varies between four and five values (on a scale of one to five stars). ACeS Cávado I Braga and ACeS Oeste Norte do not have enough criticisms/recommendations to be given a rating by Facebook.

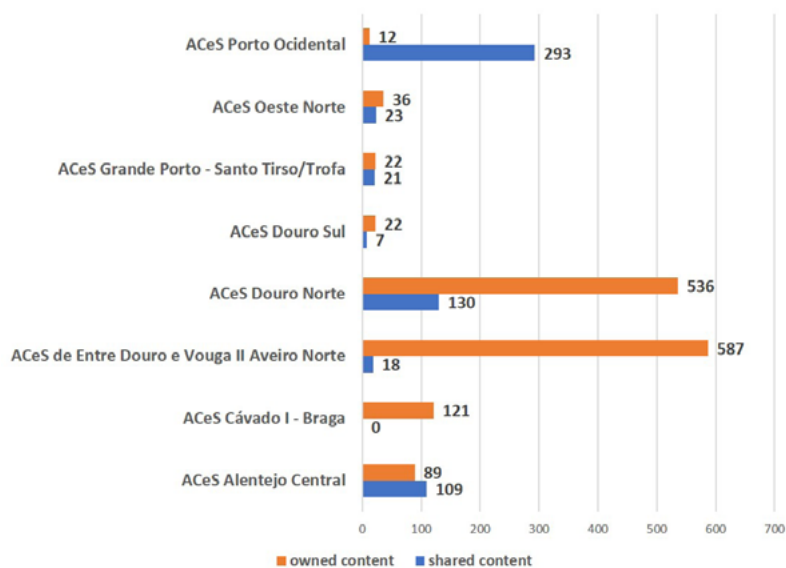
Finally, in the general characterisation of the pages under study, it is important to note that the number of followers varies between a minimum of 384 for the ACeS Grande Porto - Santo Tirso/Trofa and a maximum of 2.305 for the ACeS Douro Norte.

### ACeS ACTIVITY ON FACEBOOK

In 2018, the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde published 2.026 publications on their mural on Facebook (Graph 1), the overall equivalent of an average of five daily publications (among all the pages).

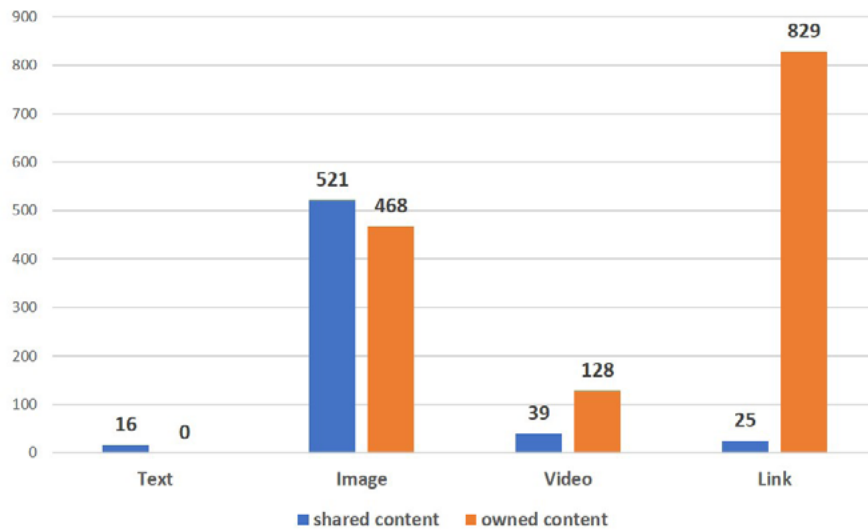
However, most posts are not their own content (this represents only 30%), but shared content from other Facebook pages or links to websites outside Facebook.

On the one hand, in the year under review, there were no publications with their own content on the ACeS Cávado I - Braga website, which only has shared publications; on the other hand, ACeS Porto Ocidental published 293 own contents in 2018, being the entity with the highest number of own publications.



Graph 1: Publications (owned and shared) by ACeS

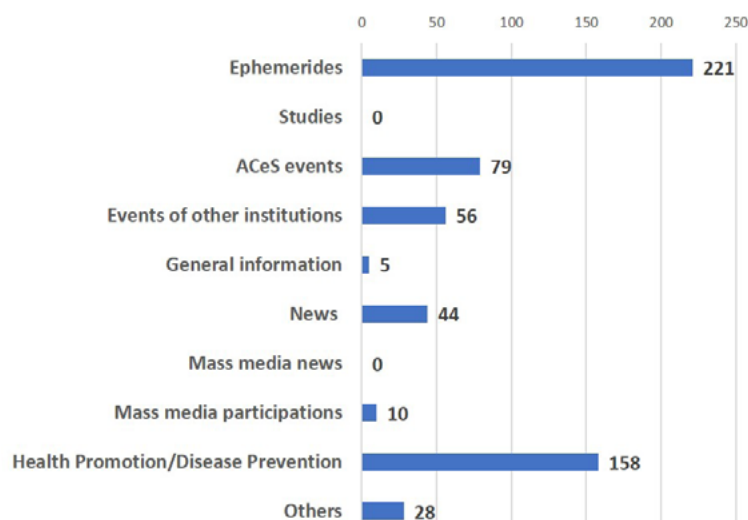
In terms of type of publications (owned or shared authorship), during the observation period, it was found that more emphasis was given to contents in image and/or photo format, corresponding to 49%, followed by publications with external links with 42%, videos with 8% and text in 1% of cases (Graph 2).



Graph 2: Publications by type (No.)

Regarding owned content, in 2018, only 39 publications had as their main content a video and only 16 were made up of text only.

With regard to the main messages conveyed by the publications made by the ACeS (of its authorship), in 2018, on Facebook (Graph 3), it can be seen that the celebration of the anniversaries is the most prominent theme with 221 publications (equivalent to 37% of all publications), soon followed by the publications that intend to contribute to health promotion (158 publications representing 26%), the dissemination of own events (79 publications) and of other institutions (56 publications) and news (44 publications).



Graph 3: Publications with ACeS owned content, by theme (No.)

It should be noted, however, that although the theme of events (owned or shared from other institutions) corresponds to 296 publications visible on the feeds of the ACeS pages in 2018, no event was registered in the tab that Facebook provides for this purpose.



It should be noted that, overall, the theme of health promotion was the one with the greatest expression, with 676 publications (158 from owned content and 518 from shared content). We believe that this result may indicate that ACeS intend to disseminate informations to health promotion, but do not have the resources to create those informations, so they share topics from other Facebook pages and/or websites.

To conclude the analysis of the ACeS activity on Facebook, it should be noted that we observed only 15 responses to comments (of the 153 existing ones), and two responses to criticisms/recommendations, in the year under analysis. In addition, 63% of the comments were not answered by the ACeS and 24 comments (16%) were placed by the ACeS itself in response to its own publication (Figure 2), 21 of them with a personal style language (performed by the Unidade de Saúde Pública do ACeS Alentejo Central).



Figure 2: Examples of publications with comments made by the ACeS themselves

### INTERACTION OF ACeS WITH OTHER PAGES/ENTITIES

With regard to the interaction of ACeS with other pages/entities, we found that there is a high dependence on external sources for the maintenance of the respective active pages, i.e., in 2018, 789 publications were shared from other pages on the Facebook (a total of 59 sources) and 636 publications were shared from external links to Facebook (from 60 sources).

The page of the Portuguese health service (SNS)<sup>16</sup> was the source where the ACeS most used, in 2018, to have publications on their feeds (55%), followed by the page of the Direção-Geral da Saúde<sup>17</sup> (23%). In all ACeS, without exception, shared publications from the SNS Facebook page were observed.

It should also be noted that there are 32 publications, in english, shared directly from the Facebook World Health Organization (WHO) page<sup>18</sup>, most of which were registered on the ACeS Entre Douro e Vouga II Aveiro Norte feed (Figure 3). The Facebook

<sup>16</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/sns.gov.pt/>

<sup>17</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/direcaogeralсаude/>

<sup>18</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/WHO/>

page of the Instituto Português do Sangue e da Transplantação<sup>19</sup> was the source of 18 publications.



Figure 3: Examples of publications shared in English

On the other hand, the main source of publications with external links (Table 4), i.e. whose main content is a link that directs the user to another web page, is the online press and the news on these published sites (57%), the website Atlas da Saúde<sup>20</sup> being the largest with 143 publications, followed by the portal Sapo Lifestyle<sup>21</sup> (51 references).

The publications that refer to the website of the Portuguese health service (SNS) correspond to 19% and to the website of the Direção-Geral da Saúde to 5%.

NAME OF THE MASS MEDIA	NO. OF REFERENCES
<i>A Voz de Trás os Montes</i>	1
Atlas das Saúde	143
<i>Dinheiro Vivo</i>	1
<i>Diário de Notícias</i>	2
<i>Dnotícias</i>	1
<i>Expresso</i>	2
<i>Ionline</i>	1
<i>Jornal das Caldas</i>	5
<i>Jornal Médico</i>	3
MAAG	30
<i>National Geographic</i>	11
<i>Notícias ao Minuto</i>	1
<i>Notícias Magazine</i>	7
<i>Observador</i>	45
<i>P3</i>	1
Portal Sapo 24	1
Portal Sapo Lifestyle	51

<sup>19</sup> Available at <https://www.facebook.com/Instituto-Portugu%C3%AAs-do-Sangue-e-da-Transplanta%C3%A7%C3%A3o-IP-216964194998749/>

<sup>20</sup> Available at [www.atlasdasaude.pt](http://www.atlasdasaude.pt)

<sup>21</sup> Available at <https://lifestyle.sapo.pt/>

<i>Público</i>	11
<i>Região de Leiria</i>	1
<i>Região do Sul</i>	1
RTP online	2
Saúde Online	1
SIC Notícias	1
Sul Informação	1
Torres Vedras Web	1
TSF	2
<i>Visão</i>	39

Table 4: Main mass media source of ACeS publications on Facebook

### USER INTERACTION WITH ACeS PAGES

In total, users reacted to the publications with 6.906 “likes”, 114 “comments” and 2.172 “shares”. However, only three ACeS have reactions in all publications (Table 5). In ACeS Douro Norte we observed 209 publications without any reaction and in ACeS Entre Douro e Vouga II Aveiro Norte 151 publications. Let’s remember that both are the ACeS with the highest number of publications in total. The absence of reaction may demonstrate lack of interest in the content made available (in 380 publications).

NAME OF ACeS	PUBLICATIONS WITHOUT USER FEEDBACK (No.)	PUBLICATIONS IN TOTAL (No.)
ACeS Alentejo Central	10	198
ACeS Cávado I - Braga	0	121
ACeS de Entre Douro e Vouga II Aveiro Norte	151	605
ACeS Douro Norte	209	666
ACeS Douro Sul	0	29
ACeS Grande Porto - Santo Tirso/Trofa	0	43
ACeS Oeste Norte	9	59
ACeS Porto Ocidental	1	305

Table 5: Publications without user feedback by ACeS

The comments left by users (Figure 4) were positive in 96 publications, neutral in 13 and negative in five cases (three visible and two hidden comments).



Figure 4: Example of comments in publications

Visitors to the ACES pages published a total of 16 publications visible on the communities tabs of the pages under review and we did not record any negative content in any of these interactions.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

This article aimed to analyse how the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS) are present on Facebook, based on the idea that this communication channel can contribute to the fulfilment of their organisational missions with regard to health promotion and disease prevention.

However, it should be noted that only eight of the 55 Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS) are present in this social networking site, which may indicate that the actors responsible for primary health care in Portugal do not recognise the value of communication nor the potential of this new communication channels as privileged vehicles to communicate with their audiences.

Moreover, ACeS with facebook pages have a reduced expression, in terms of followers, ranging from 384 people to 2.305 people.

The research also suggests, for ACeS present on Facebook, a lack of capacity to generate their own content, since 70% of the publications are shared from the other Facebook pages or shared from links to other websites.

This result leads us to argue that ACeS might perceive social networking sites as a tool for the dissemination of health-related information. This conclusion is in line with a study conducted in 2012 with public health departments, which confirmed that these services used social networking sites as another channel to distribute information, instead of creating conversation or involvement with the audience (Thackeray, Neiger, Smith & Van Wageningen, 2012).

The survey also points to a low level of interactivity between the ACeS and their followers, since only around 10% of the comments recorded were answered by the institution.

This is in line with the research of Macnamara (2014) who showed that most organizations are adopting social networks but not the practices of social networks: “we continue to apply mainly mass communication practices, unidirectional” (p.190).

In general, we have observed a concern with the propagation of messages that contribute to health promotion and disease prevention, whether associated with ephemerides or associated with specific initiatives or times of the year, such as the prevention of influenza in winter and the prevention of dehydration in summer, or the importance of vaccination.

Only a minority of publications use video, contrary to expectations, given that, as Postman (2009) argues, the convergence of low-cost camcorders, video editing software and free online services for publishing, sharing and viewing video has boosted the creation of millions of hours of video content generated on social networking sites.

We also found that in 2018, in the ACeS under analysis, no event was created in the tab that Facebook makes available for this purpose, despite the fact that 296 publications on the feeds pages were related to initiatives.

The lack of optimisation of the presence in this social networking sites, observed in this study, seems to suggest that there are no communication and/or public relations professionals in the organisational structures of the Agrupamentos de Centros de Saúde (ACeS). This finding runs counter to the current trend in the rest of the world, where there is a sharp growth of public relations professionals working in the health sector, in government entities (Place & Varderman-Winter, 2016).

It seems possible to affirm that we are very far from finding a notion of communication in its strategic function or with the intention of contributing to change (Cornelissen, 2017; Eiró-Gomes & Nunes, 2013) that allows and enhances the relationship of these institutions with their audiences, through social networking sites.

From the perspective defended by Mafalda Eiró-Gomes (2017):

communication is not a mere prop, an addendum, or something that is used in a time of distress (e.g. lack of funds or reputational damage), but rather a way of being and thinking, a founding element of the organizations themselves, totally intertwined in their practices and constitutive of their policies. (p. 6)

According to this idea and given its focus on the publics and the pursuit of objectives and fulfillment of the organizational mission, it seems essential that those responsible for primary health care urgently recognize the role of public relations and communication in their institutions.

As a consequence of this research, and following what Springston and Lariscy (2010) have already advocated, we believe that the ACeS should place public relations as a central element in the development of messages that enable them to achieve their organizational missions and, thus, contribute to health promotion and disease prevention.

Often the conclusion of one investigation is no more than the beginning of another. An analysis of the reasons justifying the lack of investment or the non-inclusion of social networking sites as channels of communication for the fulfilment of the mission and objectives of these institutions will remain as a future perspective for research.

In the case of ACeS that are currently present on Facebook, it is expected in the future to understand the objectives of that presence and the qualifications of the people responsible for managing those pages. As most of the publications are shared from the pages of the Portuguese health service (SNS) and the Direção-Geral da Saúde, the analysis of the contents available on both pages will be left for future studies.

It may also be relevant to analyse whether the functional units of the ACeS, such as family health units, community care units and public health units are present in the social networking sites and what kind of communications/relationships they develop in these platforms.

Translation: Andreia Garcia and Mafalda Eiró-Gomes

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## TOURIST PROMOTION ON TWITTER

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### ABSTRACT

Tourism represents an important source of income in many countries. Aware of this fact, Ibero-American governments seek to invest in digital communication to promote themselves and position themselves as tourist destinations. Twitter is one of the most influential social networks in the commercial sphere, due to the amount of conversations it produces around brands, adding value to its image and influencing purchasing decisions. In addition, it is also a useful tool for collecting user opinions, due to the monitoring facility it provides. This network also allows organizations to provide personalized and immediate attention to their audiences, providing them with more pleasant contact experiences. This paper investigates the presence of Ibero-American governments on Twitter, as well as their interaction with 2.0 tourists. To this end, a comparative analysis was carried out between the months of March and August (including high and low seasons) of 2015 and 2018. The results showed that Ibero-American governments use Twitter as a platform for communication and tourism promotion, but without the presence of a communication strategy that strengthens the image and positioning of the tourist destination. It is not surprising, therefore, that there is a lack of planning for presence on the network, since periods of excessive participation in Twitter alternate with phases of abandonment, which affects the participation rates of the tourist and the involvement achieved.

### KEYWORDS

public relations 2.0; communication 2.0; Twitter; tourism promotion; Ibero-America

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## PROMOÇÃO TURÍSTICA NO TWITTER

### RESUMO

O turismo representa uma importante fonte de receita em muitos países. Cientes deste facto, os governos ibero-americanos procuram apostar na comunicação digital para se promoverem e para se posicionarem como destinos turísticos. O Twitter é uma das redes sociais mais influentes no âmbito comercial, devido à quantidade de conversações que produz em torno das marcas, acrescentando valor à sua imagem e influenciando as decisões de compra. Para além disso, também é uma ferramenta útil para recolher as opiniões dos utilizadores, pela facilidade de monitorização que fornece. Esta rede permite, ainda, que as organizações prestem uma atenção personalizada e imediata aos seus públicos, proporcionando-lhes experiências de contacto

mais agradáveis. Este trabalho investiga a presença dos governos ibero-americanos no Twitter, bem como a sua interação com os turistas 2.0. Para tal, realizou-se uma análise comparativa entre os meses de março e agosto (incluindo épocas alta e baixa) de 2015 e 2018. Os resultados mostraram que os governos ibero-americanos utilizam o Twitter como plataforma de comunicação e de promoção turística, mas sem a presença de uma estratégia de comunicação que fortaleça a imagem e o posicionamento do destino turístico. Não é de estranhar, por isso, que se verifique a falta de planeamento da presença na rede, já que se alternam períodos de excessiva participação no Twitter com fases de abandono, o que incide nos índices de participação do turista e no envolvimento alcançado.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

relações públicas 2.0; comunicação 2.0; Twitter; promoção turística; Ibero-América

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## INTRODUCTION

The tendency of society to relate through communities – networks – that share similar interests is the basis for the creation of social media. Castells (2005) considers that “the new electronic means of communication do not stray from traditional cultures, but absorb them” (p. 403). In this way, social media allows the creation of digital communities in which relationships are established between individuals with equivalent interests.

López-Carril, Villamón Herrera and Añó Sanz (2019) state that “social media is an umbrella concept that encompasses communication tools based on internet technologies and new media, which allow organizations and/or individuals to interact, exchanging information and content generated individually or shared, in real time or asynchronously” (p. 471).

In this scenario, social media are being used to putting into practice relational marketing strategies, which seek to create virtual communities around a brand or product. In these online communities, consumer participation is valued, in a two-way communication process, which privileges the principles of dialogue, transparency and collaboration (López & Moreno, 2019). Thus, social media is a “real meeting place where users with common expectations share information about the products that interest them” (Túnñez-López, Sixto García & Guevara-Castillo, 2011, pp. 53-65).

In this context, tourist companies should promote the creation of these virtual communities, seeking to obtain direct information from their audiences, control what is said about them and, consequently, make improvements and adaptations in their services, in order to respond to the needs of the market and, mainly, to strengthen relations with their public.

On web 2.0 “interaction with and between individuals is enhanced, since the network simplifies the business processes of organizations and the daily lives of consumers” (Martínez Sala, 2018, p. 5). That is why tourists also tend to prefer social networks when planning their trips. In an investigation conducted by Paniagua and Huertas (2018a) it was noticed that 70% of travelers, before choosing a vacation spot, search for information on the web search engines and in the official digital spaces of the different

destinations, with the objective of identifying the main attractions, the best gastronomic routes, leisure activities, shopping opportunities, as well as available excursions. No wonder, therefore, that Tripadvisor (26,1%), the official Facebook page of each tourist destination (18,9%), travel blogs (13%) and destination blogs (10%) and Facebook accounts of friends and family represent the media to which tourists give greater credibility.

Nevertheless, there are still those who prefer to resort to traditional travel agencies, as these allow the existence of an official face in cases of complaints, for example. Even so, it is confirmed what Túnñez-López, Altamirano and Valarezo (2016) stated in 2016:

tourist 2.0 uses the internet not only as a source of information, but also plans his trip using technological tools, operating in collaborative communities in which he finds comments, suggestions, and opinions from other travelers. His participation in these spaces is active, voluntary, and committed, so he is also recognized as a tourism promoter who generates content, shares his experiences and recommendations. (p. 250)

Due to their impact and their capacity for social penetration, social media have become important tools for organizational communication, with great relevance in the tourist area. But it is the users who establish the rules and decide what activity to do, what to see, which brand to follow and how to communicate and companies are condemned to adapt to this new reality.

Tourist 2.0 requires a 2.0 attitude (updating, participation and interaction) and a commitment from tourist organizations that, if they wish to relate successfully in the online scenario, they must establish strategic, dynamic, creative and interactive communication. “There is no doubt that without commitment, without strategy, without target and without humanization of the brand, there is no effective management of social media” (Ayestarán, Rangel & Ana, 2012, p. 238).

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Tourism communication is constantly changing. It has evolved from mass-controlled communication, centered on the asymmetric and vertical promotion of popular tourist destinations, to a new era of web-based multimedia information (Túnñez-Lopes et al., 2016). The Cluetrain manifesto (Levine, Locke, Searls & Weinberger, 2000) stated that markets are conversations. However, nowadays, markets are relationships, because it is no longer enough to listen to audiences. Tourism organizations must learn to relate to them within new digital outlines, adapting their communication processes to the changes that mark tourists 2.0 and to information and communication technologies (ICT), creating direct and bidirectional communication channels with specific audiences.

### **PUBLIC RELATIONS 2.0**

The evolution of public relations is evident. Cuenca Fontbona and Matilla (2015) carried out an analysis verifying this progress. Summarizing the contributions of several

authors, they realized that in 2000 a classic concept prevailed, which defined public relations as the quality of relations and communication in public management, highlighting a very close vision of the individual and the concept of trust generated through communication and interaction between organizations and audiences. In 2010, the notion of intangible assets was incorporated, and public relations started to be defined as reputation management. Based on these two premises, the new digital media have dialogical, interactive and relational properties that make them the ideal mechanism to support the strategic management of public relations (Grunig, 2009, quoted in Costa, 2016).

Tourism activity is characterized by the intense use of information. This circumstance can be explained by the remarkable impact of ICT on consumption and production processes (Ivars Baidal & Solsona Monzonís, 2016) and by their influence on the purchase decision.

The implementation of these new technologies in public relations helps organizations to achieve their goals, to cultivate their relations with society and to reduce conflict, when their communication is strategic, planned, symmetrical, integrated and ethical (Paricio Esteban, Femenía Almerich, Del Olmo Arriagay & Sánchez Valle, 2019). In addition, these digital media allow activities and communication strategies to be carried out in a more segmented and effective way (Fernández Rincón & Hellín Ortuño, 2018).

In this scenario, the evolution of public relations in the 2.0 context is evident (Table 1) and this should be reflected in the communication planning.

TRADITIONAL PUBLIC RELATIONS	PUBLIC RELATIONS 2.0
Key audiences	Micro-targets, tribes, social media
The company in the media	The company is the way
A key message	Networks of dynamic conversations
Communication strategies	Communication experiences
Technology as a support	BFLT (breathe, feel, live and think) in technology
Press information	Social value content
Management of perceptions	Confidence builders
Official communication	RSS of employees
Image of the company	Conversations design
Attributes	Values

Table 1. Traditional public relations *versus* public relations 2.0

Source: Fernández, 2010, pp. 1-2

Based on the differentiation presented by Fernández (2010), it can be said that public relations 2.0 requires a greater commitment from tourism organizations in establishing links with the target audience. In this sense, Ramos Ostio (2012) defines public relations 2.0 as:

the discipline that provides reciprocal, interactive, dynamic and necessarily continuous communication between an organization and its audiences, through the internet. It is aimed at a proactive, informed, hypersegmented public that, in some cases, will facilitate the organization's work, due to its previous interests and, in others, it will hinder dialogue due to the power of selection, creation and filtering of information. (p. 75)

In this new scenario, social media should be considered as public relations tools, taking into account their potential to create dialogue and establish relationships with audiences (Huertas Roig & Mariné Roig, 2014). This dialogue must be symmetrical, constant and committed to the interests of users (Viñarás Abad & Cabezuelo Lorenzo, 2012). In addition, he said, social media allows the identification of established communities that have interests in common with the tourism organization.

But as usual, any communication procedure requires strategic planning, through the implementation of a communication plan. Concerning public relations 2.0, this planning must be governed by the following premises:

- to create public profiles that respect the organization's strategy;
- to generate content suitable for each medium and go beyond the institution's news and news;
- to participate actively and regularly in publications;
- to not fear the loss of control, allowing users to interact, comment and promote;
- to generate value and enrich the users' experience;
- to incorporate people with experience (Gómez Vílchez, 2012).

To these premises must be added the monitoring and permanent assessment of the digital environment. One should never fail to follow the conversations that take place in the virtual communities (own and external), as their constant monitoring exposes the shared opinions about the destination, so that it is possible to offer a service more aligned with the requirements and with the needs of the tourist 2.0.

### **TWITTER AS A PLATFORM FOR PUBLIC RELATIONS 2.0**

Twitter is a free platform that allows the creation and publication of content on the web. It is linked to the culture of mobile phones and text messages. Its dimension as an online social network gives messages the potential for instant sharing and its global character makes it an extraordinary tool for monitoring information, sources and trends (Orihuela, 2010), offering the possibility to "listen" to markets and customers in a different, empathetic and close way, optimizing its dialogical potential (García Medina, Miquel-Segarra & Navarro-Beltrá, 2018).

Twitter is probably one of the most influential social networks in the commercial sphere due to the number of messages and conversations it produces around brands, intervening in the creation of their images and influencing purchase decisions. A successful brand community can help strengthen consumer loyalty by serving as a multi-directional communication and knowledge-sharing channel (Andersen, 2005, quoted in Sánchez Jiménez, 2018). On the other hand, Twitter is also an important tool to collect opinions from users, due to the monitoring facility it provides, allowing personalized and immediate attention, generating a pleasant experience with customers who value the response of organizations.

It is important to remember that:

we are facing a consumer who demands and accesses much more information, precisely thanks to the internet, where, with the click of a button, an infinite amount of data is obtained, both from the offer, as from companies or other users: comments on blogs, networks, websites... All this means that the consumer is much more demanding; therefore, companies must adapt by showing themselves to be attractive and competitive, in various ways, in order to reach all users, providing them with the information they require. (Araújo Vila, Cardoso & Filipe de Araújo, 2019, p. 22)

Thus, Twitter should be a tool that facilitates a more personal contact with the new digital tourist, helping him before and during the trip, while benefiting for the tourist destination (Torrado Rodríguez & Blanco Gregory, 2019).

This new form of communication has revolutionized the world and its influence depends on the quality of the content generated. It is not just about getting followers, it is about providing relevant information so that they stay on the web.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The objective of this investigation was related to the analysis of communication 2.0 on the Twitter pages of Ibero-American governments, by applying the model of evaluation of communication 2.0 in social media (Altamirano Benítez, Marín-Gutiérrez & Ordóñez González, 2018; Altamirano Benítez, Ochoa & Túnnez-López, 2018), which analyzes four variables: the presence on the network, growth, the activity of government agencies and the interactivity between governments and tourists 2.0.

Qualitative methodology was applied in order to conceptualize the management of tourism communication and 2.0 communication processes, defining models and trends in digital environments. The quantitative study, on the other hand, helped to measure possible relationships between variables. For this quantitative analysis, data were collected from the different performance indicators (KPI), with the aim of verifying relationships, which helped to describe the behavior of tourism organizations and tourists, in digital environments.



The study thus enabled a descriptive analysis of the Twitter accounts of the 22 Ibero-American governments in two different periods, which allowed for a comparative approach. In order to have data on the presence on the network of each of the governments, the PRGS (presence, answer, generation and suggestion) model, proposed by Interactive Advertising Bureau Spain (2016), was used as a reference, which obtains this data from the sum of the tweets published by the followers. To determine the growth of tourism accounts on Twitter, two performance indicators (KPIs) were used: (1) the number of followers and (2) the total growth of the network. In order to examine the activity of government accounts, a review of the main performance indicators was used, such as the number of publications, the frequency or number of daily publications and the multimedia resources used. In turn, interactivity was analyzed by assessing the responses, suggestions and levels of participation of users and, in addition, the level of response from government agencies, to obtain engagement data. To measure the tourist communication 2.0 index, indicators of presence, growth, activity, participation and engagement were used.

To generate valid and comparable indexes, the results were standardized using the minimum and maximum formula.

Data collection was carried out with a convenience sample, but sufficiently representative due to its time span and the inclusion of all the actors that make up the study universe. The analysis period extended from March to August – to include the high and low seasons of tourism in the years 2015 and 2018.

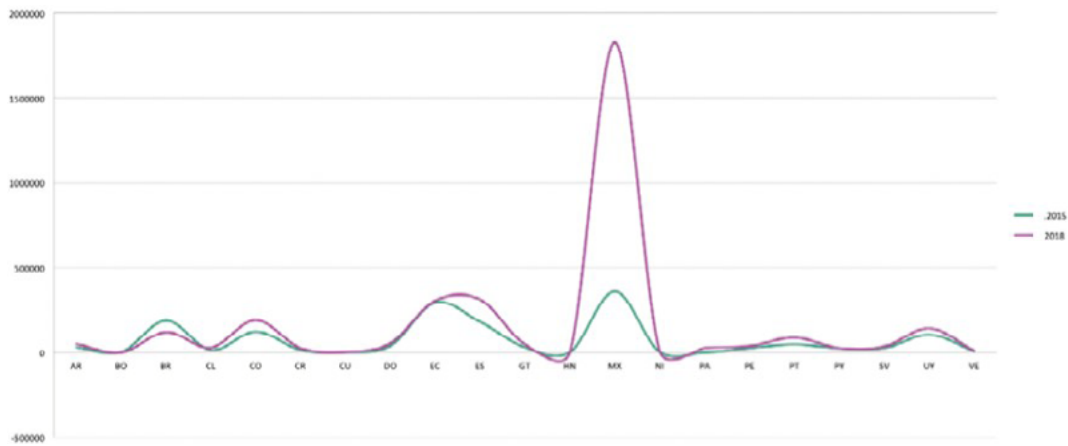
## RESULTS

### PRESENCE AND IMPACT

Twitter, as a tool of direct communication, presents an extraordinary growth, which, as is predictable, is reflected in the social, cultural, political and economic life of a country or region (Fainholc, 2011). In addition, Twitter is a social platform that enhances the visibility, credibility and growth of any business (Ramos, 2013).

In 2015, “the growth of Twitter users in Ibero-America reached 17,4%, exceeding the world average (14,1%). At first glance, this means a significant expansion of the social network in the region, given the observable conditions in terms of internet use per capita” (Villalobos, 2015, § 2). This positions Twitter as the second most used social network for tourism promotion, with 20 countries integrating it in their 2.0 communication strategies. In 2018, Panama also incorporated the platform into its tourism communication strategy.

To analyze network presence, the PRGS model from Interactive Advertising Bureau Spain (2016) was applied. In the two study periods, Mexico led the ranking of attendance and, in 2015, the second position was occupied by Ecuador, followed by Brazil and Spain; in 2018, Spain took second place in the ranking, followed by Ecuador, Brazil and Colombia. In the Spanish government’s account, the network presence is also influenced by the number of tweets it publishes in the two periods, being one of the most active in the network (Graph 1).



Graph 1: Presence

Nevertheless, with reference to the global penetration of the social network, the data show little impact achieved by the accounts of Ibero-American governments on Twitter. In 2015, Mexico and Ecuador reached only 0,1% of the 320 million registered users on the network<sup>1</sup> and, in 2018, Mexico reached 0,5% and Spain, the second country with the highest number followers, achieved 0,09% of the 335 million users (Twitter ya no crece más en usuarios, 2018).

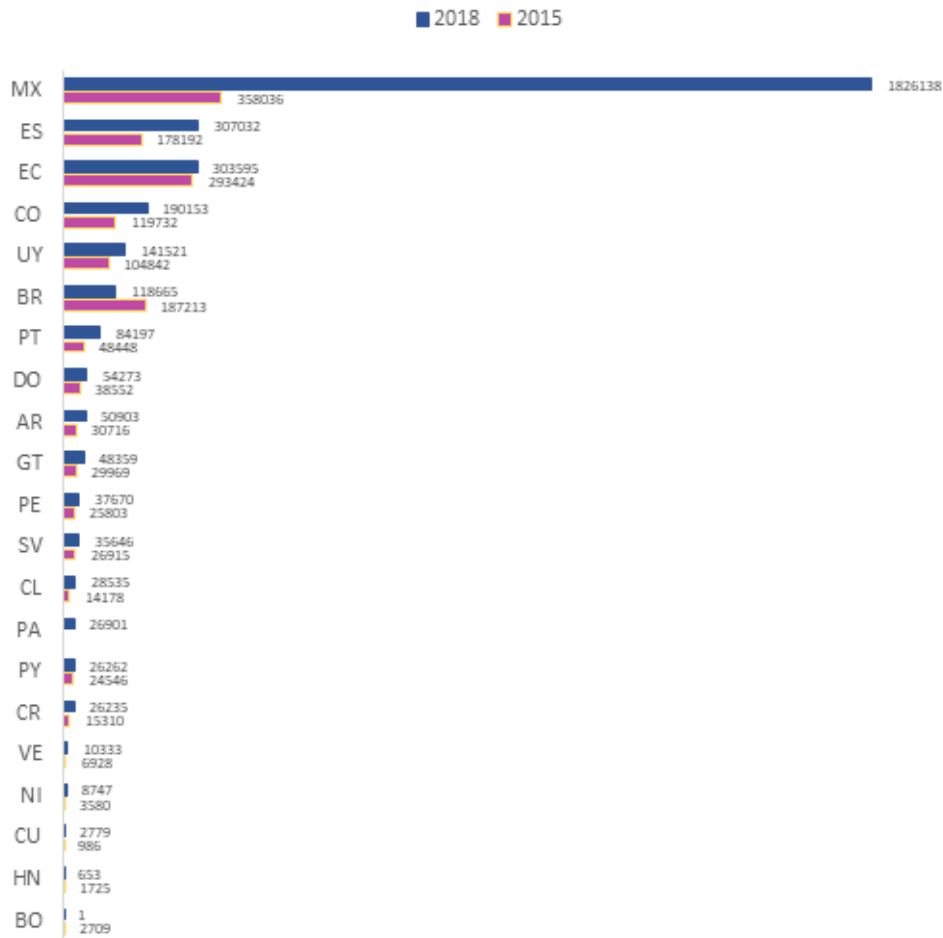
## GROWTH

To assess growth, the analysis is made from KPI1 = number of followers and KPI2 = total network growth.

### NUMBER OF FOLLOWERS

One of the main characteristics of social media is the fact that they need a community that promotes relationships. However, the countries of Ibero-America have no impact with the accounts created for the promotion of tourism. By conducting a comparative analysis between 2015 and 2018, Mexico gained 1.468.102 followers, followed by Cuba and Nicaragua, which grew 100% over the three years. Portugal, Spain, Costa Rica, Argentina and Guatemala reached between 50 and 75 percentage points (Graph 2).

<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <http://www.iredes.es/mapa/>



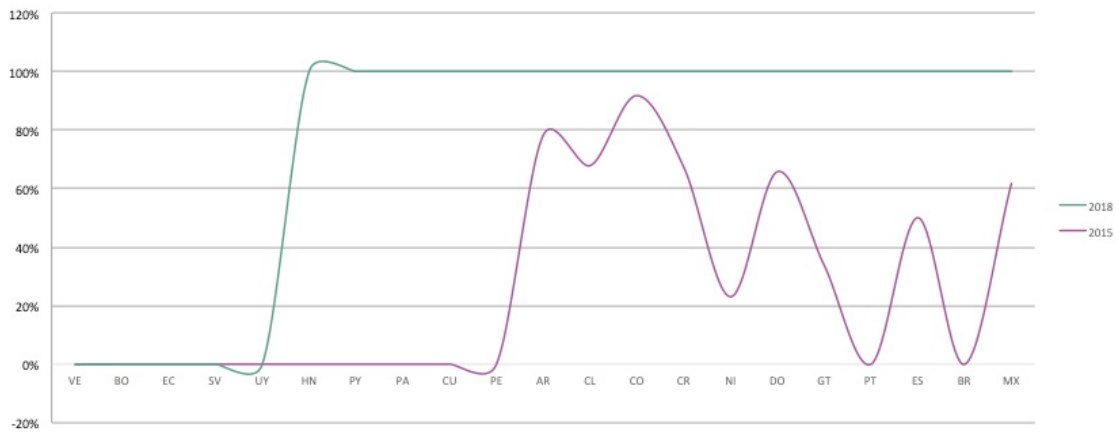
Graph 2: Number of followers

Bolivia, Honduras and Brazil, during this period, lost, respectively, 100%, 62% and 37% of their followers and it should be emphasized that Bolivia's account is no longer active. Countries like Ecuador and Paraguay had a lower growth, between three and six percentage points.

### TOTAL GROWTH

Total growth was calculated by comparing the number of followers at the beginning and end of a period. When comparing 2015 and 2018, it is evident that Venezuela, Bolivia, Ecuador, El Salvador and Uruguay have failed to increase the number of users.

The accounts that registered the greatest growth were Nicaragua (234%), followed by Guatemala (96%) and Spain (1,7%). There was also a decrease in Colombia (91%), Argentina (72%) and Chile (52%) (Graph 3).



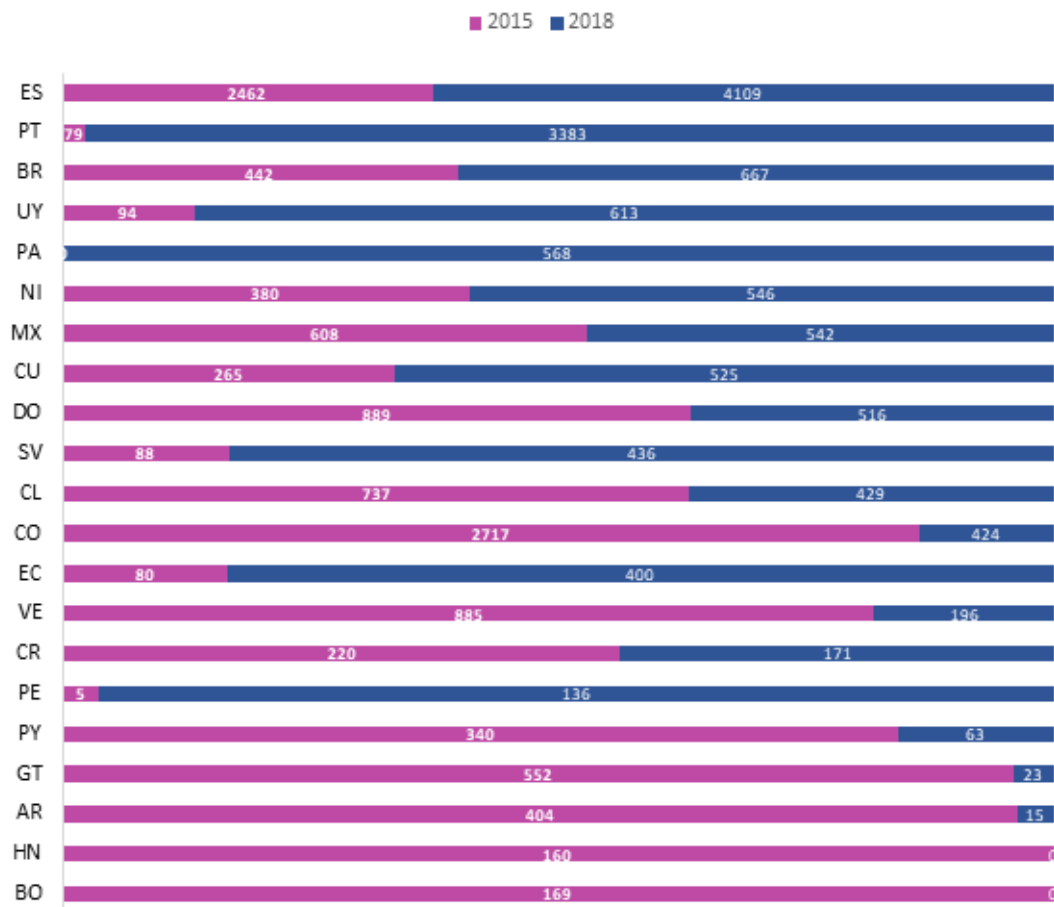
Graph 3: Total growth

### ACTIVITY IN TOURIST ACCOUNTS

The activity was analysed through the interrelationships that are derived from analysis of KPI<sub>1</sub>= the number of publications, KPI<sub>2</sub>= the frequency or number of daily publications, and KPI<sub>3</sub>= the multimedia resources used.

### NUMBER OF PUBLICATIONS

The level of updating of tourist accounts is intermittent, as there are periods of excessive participation followed by days of inactivity. The number of publications is variable and there are countries like Spain, Portugal and Panama that have increased the number of publications. For example, Portugal exceeds 3.000 tweets. However, there are countries that register a high number of publications in 2015, but in 2018 their participation decreased, as can be seen in Graph 4.



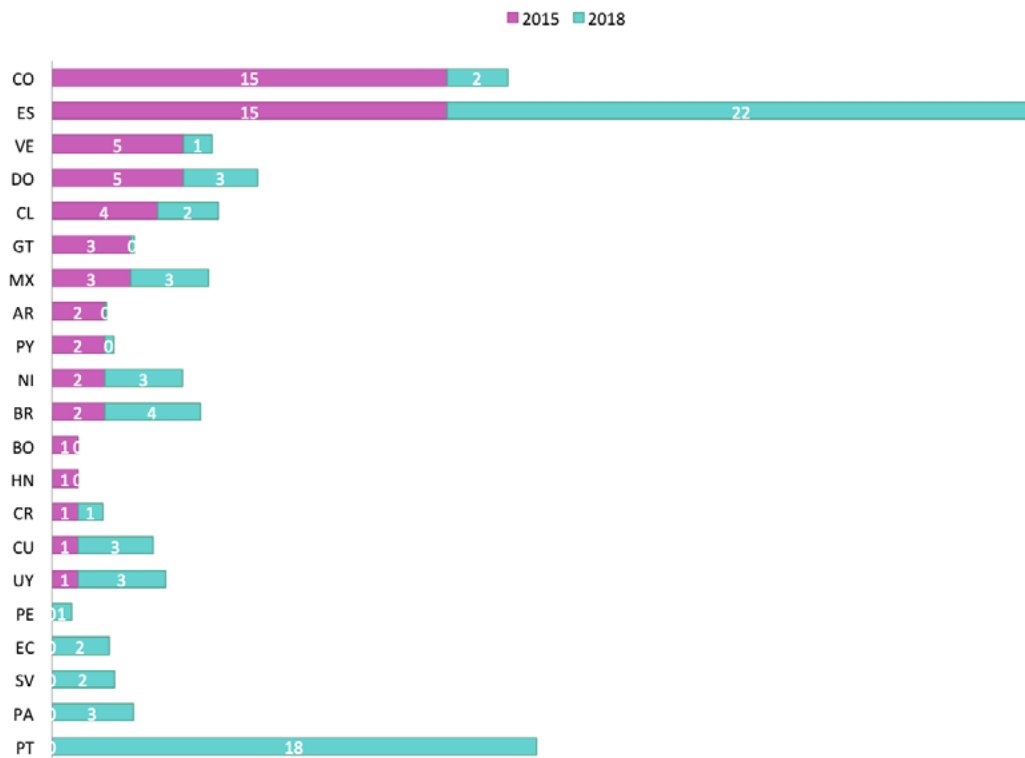
Graph 4: Number of publications

### NUMBER OF DAILY PUBLICATIONS

When comparing the data in 2015 and 2018, it was found that Ibero-American governments did not manage Twitter accounts strategically. Taking as a model the study “Internet Republic”, by Sánchez Amboage, Rodríguez Fernández, Martínez Fernández, Rodríguez Vázquez and Álvarez de la Torre (2014), it is argued that the ideal average number of publications in this social network is five to seven tweets per day.

In 2015, 85% and in 2018, 90,5% of the accounts did not update the network frequently, with five countries found each year that did not publish daily. On the contrary, in the first period analyzed, Spain and Colombia saturated the network with 15 posts per day and, in the second period, Spain increased its publications to 22 posts per day and Portugal to 18 daily publications.

In 2015, however, there were two accounts (Venezuela and Dominican Republic) that maintained an ideal level of publication, according to the study mentioned above. In 2018, no country was able to optimize its publications.



Graph 5: Number of daily publications

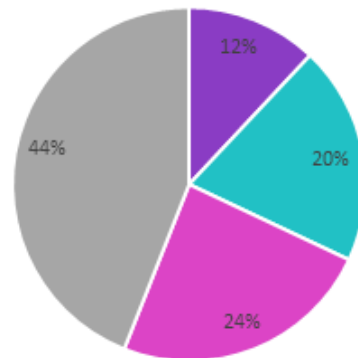
### MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

The implementation of multimedia resources in social media and the assessment of their impact is a topic of interest to many academics. Multimedia, which is understood as the confluence of various means to transmit a message, finds, in web 2.0, a fundamental ally. The new technological tools allow content such as images, videos, texts and sounds to reach users easily. In fact, the convergence of these formats becomes the key to digital communication (Costa Sánchez & Piñeiro Otero, 2014).

To make the offer more tangible and attract more tourists, the preferred multimedia resources of the Ibero-American governments were images, used in 44% of the tweets, followed by the links, found in 24% of the posts, and the combination of the two resources, which are present in 20% of publications. On the other side, 12% of publications are text.

It should be noted that, despite the importance attributed to video as a resource for tourism promotion (Martínez-Sala & Campillo Alhama, 2018), this resource was not incorporated in the tourist campaigns analysed (Graph 6).

■ Text ■ Images and links ■ Links ■ Images



Graph 6: Multimedia resources

### INTERACTIVITY

Based on the premise interactivity fuels engagement explained by Fondevila Gascón, Berianin Bañares, Olmo Arriaga and Valero Herмосilla (2014), interactivity becomes a key element to study in tourist communication 2.0. In this study, interactivity is analyzed with KPI<sub>1</sub> = the responses, suggestions, and levels of user engagement and KPI<sub>2</sub> = the level of service of government agencies to obtain engagement data.

### RESPONSE

To evaluate the response of tourists 2.0, the PGRS model (Interactive Advertising Bureau Spain, 2016) was used. It can be said that the response of users on Twitter is determined by the network presence of government agencies, the permanent updating of the account and the quality of the published content. In the two study periods, Spain, with 137.525 (2015) and 332.001 (2018) likes, consolidates itself as the country with the greatest acceptance. In 2015, the Dominican Republic and Colombia follow, and in 2018, Mexico and Brazil. It should be noted that there is a proportional relationship with the number of posts in these accounts, except in the case of Mexico, which, with 13% fewer publications, reaches a greater impact, probably due to the quality of these publications.

Countries that do not obtain user participation are those that do not update their accounts: in 2015, Paraguay and Peru and, in 2018, Bolivia and Honduras (Graph 7).



Graph 7: Response

**SUGGESTION**

The viral nature generated by the content published on Twitter is essential to assess the impact of a tourism account. The PRGS Model was used to measure the suggestion through the retweets made by the followers. In the analysis, results similar to the response were obtained, with the countries that managed the greatest viral content, in 2015, being Spain, Colombia and the Dominican Republic and, in 2018, Spain, Mexico and Brazil (Graph 8).





Graph 8: Suggestion

**PARTICIPATION**

The participation rate of users on Twitter was obtained by adding the total number of responses to the total number of suggestions made. To the results, the min.-max. formula was applied, which allowed standardization of data to catalog tourist accounts.

It was observed, then, that the Spanish account, both in 2015 and in 2018, was the only one that achieved success among users, and can be evaluated as participatory. But in 2018, Mexico also led the ranking, due to the communication strategies implemented. However, 56% of the analyzed sample was not very participative and 37% did not reach the minimum scores (Table 2).

2015		2018		CATEGORY
COUNTRY	RATE	COUNTRY	RATE	
ES	100	ES	100	Participatory
		MX	73	
CO	8	BR	19	Improvable
DO	8	PT	6	
MX	5	UY	5	
BR	5	DO	4	
CR	3	SV	4	
CL	2	NI	3	
GT	2	CO	3	
AR	2	CR	2	
EC	1	PA	2	
PT	1	CL	2	
NI	1	EC	1	
PY	1			
SV	0,4	GT	0,5	
VE	0,4	PY	0,5	
UY	0,2	CU	0,3	
BO	0,2	PE	0,3	
CU	0,1	AR	0,03	
HN	0	VE	0,01	
PE	0	HN	0	
PA	0	BO	0	

Table 2: Rate of participation

## RESPONSE LEVEL

The 2.0 commitment that tourist organizations must acquire when using social media as platforms for promotion prescribes the success they can achieve in the digital environment. Based on this principle, the response level was calculated as a function of the conversation rate, understood as interactions with other profiles, using identifications (@).

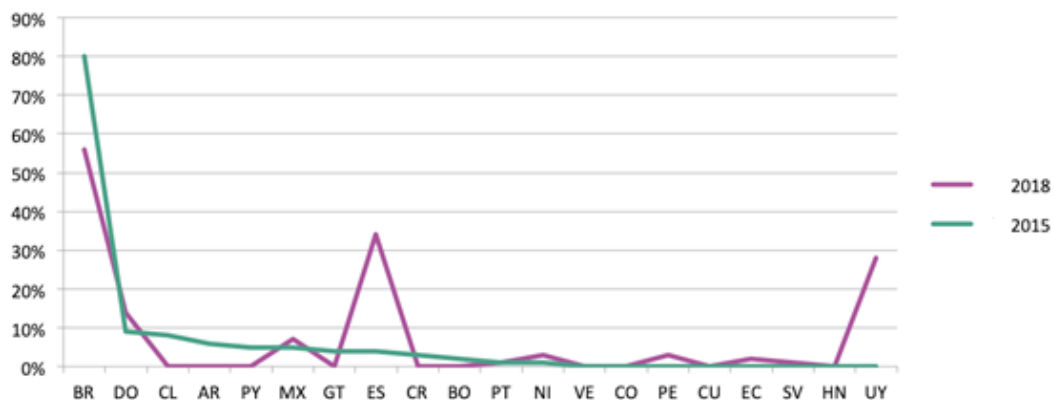
Reaching 80% in 2015 and 56% in 2018, Brazil consolidated itself as the country with the best conversation rate and, although it did not respond directly to internet users, its 2.0 communication strategy sought to promote interaction, by identifying other Twitter accounts.

In 2015, with a large margin of difference, the Dominican Republic (9%) and Chile (8%) interacted very little with followers through identifications, which indicates that it is not in the interest of their governments to promote interaction on the network. In 2018, Spain improved its conversation rate to 34%, while the Dominican Republic rose by five percentage points. Countries like Uruguay, Peru and Ecuador, with a rate of 0% in 2015, now have a conversation level of 28%, 3% and 2% respectively. However, talking

to followers is not a priority for governments and 50% of the sample does not interact at this time.

These results coincide with the conclusions of Castelló Martínez, Del Pino Romero and Ramos Soler (2014), who showed that most brands understand Twitter as an information channel, in which users receive content, instead of classifying it as an opportunity to dialogue with consumers and understand their needs and concerns.

Finally, Venezuela's tourist account promotes itself as the channel of interaction with tourists, however, as shown, it does not fulfill the objective of its creation, due to the little interaction it maintains with tourists 2.0 (Graph 9).



Graph 9: Conversation rate

## ENGAGEMENT

Engagement, according to González-Bernal, Roncallo-Dow and Arango-Forero, 2018 (quoted in Ventín Sánchez, 2019), is a complex and multidimensional concept that the authors apply to the study of audiences from four dimensions: the user experience (motivations and expectations), emotional response, the result of the cognitive process (attention, memory and learning) and behaviors and participations. Engagement consists of an interactive and bilateral process between some subjects (citizens, workers, customers, users and social networks) and some organizations (public administration, company, digital platform). On the subjects' side, engagement refers to both a cognitive state and its own manifestation, since it materializes the symbolic representations made through the use of social networks (like, share, comment) such as physical gestures, attitudes or expressions of opinions (Ballesteros Herencia, 2019).

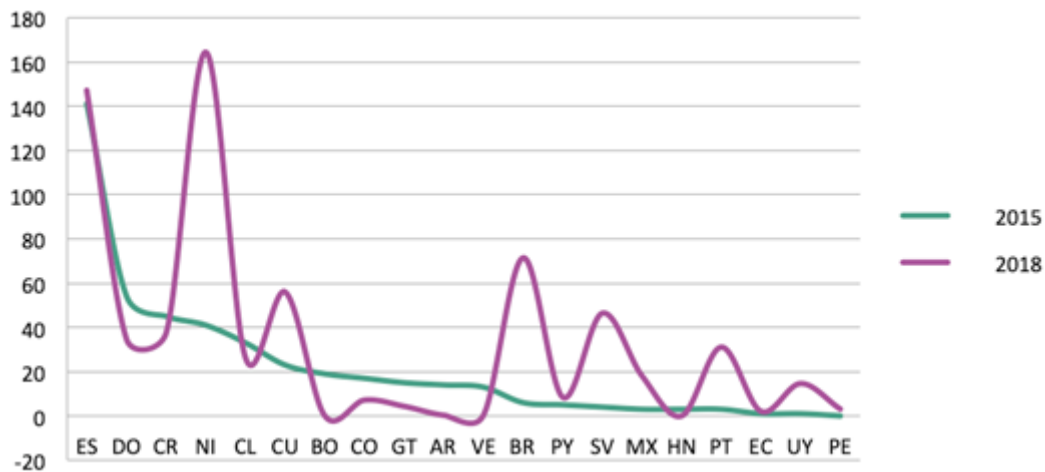
In this way, the relationship established between tourism organizations in Ibero-America and 2.0 tourists on Twitter determines engagement in the social environment. To calculate it, the following formula, previously utilized in several investigations (Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Martínez-Fernández, Sánchez-Amboage, Mahauad-Burneo & Altamirano-Benítez, 2015; Valerio, Herrera, Herrera & Rodríguez, 2014), was used:

$$\text{Engagement} = \frac{\text{Likes + retweets}}{\text{N}^\circ \text{ followers}} \times 100$$

Due to factors such as updating the network in a non-strategic and frequent way, as well as the low commitment 2.0 of government agencies in Ibero-America, Twitter engagement was also low.

In 2015, Spain led all aspects analysed, maintaining an engagement of 141, followed by the Dominican Republic with an engagement level of 54 points, Costa Rica with 45 points and Nicaragua, very close to this value, with 41 points. There are seven countries where the level of engagement is less than 33.

In 2018 the engagement of Twitter accounts improved. Nicaragua reached 164 points, followed by Spain with a score of 147 and Brazil, with 71, but the other countries do not exceed 30 points (Graph 10).



Graph 10: Engagement

The results showed that Ibero-American organizations must improve their digital strategies to achieve greater engagement with 2.0 tourists. It must be remembered that the power of the brand is something emotional (Liberos, Núñez, Bareño, García, Gutiérrez & Pino, 2014), so it is important to invest in commitment and involvement with consumers.

#### INDEX OF COMMUNICATION 2.0 ON TWITTER

In order to know the 2.0 tourist communication index, the 2.0 communication evaluation model was applied to social media (Altamirano-Benítez et al., 2018). As previously mentioned, Twitter is a participatory, interactive and committed tool. Thus, the model for evaluating its effectiveness integrates the presence, growth, activity, participation, response and engagement indices. These indices are generated by standardization with the minimum and maximum formula.

After creating the indices for each of the Twitter accounts of the tourist destinations, the results of the analysed variables were added and divided by six, in order to weight and catalog the results (Table 3).

FANPAGE	PRESENCE		
	Indicators	Index	Formula application
Fanpage 1	1.837.643	100	Calculation of the index of presence (N <sub>Pi</sub> ) of the fanpage 2:
Fanpage 2	1.136.504	58	$N_{Pi} = \frac{X}{1.136.504} \times 100$
Fanpage 3	1.111.591	56	$N_{Pi} = \frac{X}{1.136.504} \times 100$
Fanpage 4	176.287	0	
X = value of the analyzed fanpage		1.136.504	$N_{Pi} = \frac{X}{1.136.504} \times 100$

FANPAGE	PRESENCE		
	Indicators	Index	Formula application
Min = is the minimum value of all fanpages			176.287
Max = is the maximum value of all fanpages			1.837.643
			$N_{Pi} = 57,79$

Table 3: Formula application example (Altamirano-Benítez et al., 2019)

From the evaluation, it can be concluded that communication processes 2.0 are not optimal, it is even evidenced that the indices decrease from period to period. Spain maintains its acceptable category, but in 2018 it is surpassed by Mexico due to the participation promoted by its users.

COUNTRY	2015	COUNTRY	2018	CATEGORY
				Efficient 81 - 100
				Acceptable high 61 - 80
ES	60	MX	51	Acceptable 41 - 60
		ES	48	
MX	39			Acceptable low 21 - 40
BR	30	BR	30	
CO	28			

DO	19	CL	19	
EC	14	PT	17	
CL	13	AR	16	
CR	9	SV	11	
GT	9	NI	9	
AR	8	DO	8	
NI	8	HN	7	
VE	8	CR	7	
PY	6	CO	7	Improvable 0 - 20
UY	6	UY	6	
BO	4	PA	6	
CU	4	EC	6	
PT	4	PE	5	
SV	2	PY	4	
HN	1	BO	4	
PE	1	CU	2	
PA	0	GT	2	
		VE	1	

Table 4: Communication index 2.0

The analysis showed that 17 (in 2015) and 18 (in 2018) of tourist accounts are classified as upgradeable, as they do not exceed the 20 points of the 2.0 communication index (Table 4). It can then be concluded that, on Twitter, there is no 2.0 tourist communication. The social network is used for the unidirectional sending of content, becoming a traditional information medium. Thus, the levels of interaction with users should be improved, mainly.

The tourist 2.0 that uses Twitter is more participatory and demands better quality content. In addition, Twitter is a platform that attracts adult users. The percentage of young people (10 to 17 years old) with a presence in this network is low, so there are reasons why cognitive maturity (between 30 and 45 years old) makes Twitter an innovative network (Infra, 2010, quoted in Aladro Vico & Villalba de Benito, 2014, p. 22).

Finally, the behavior and commitment 2.0 of tourist organizations is low, which is reflected in the low levels of updating and responses on the network.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

There were considerable changes between the two study periods. Paradoxically, tourism organizations in 2018 are, against prognosis, less active on the network and interact less with their audience, despite the fact that 2.0 tourists are more active on Twitter. Due to this traditional behavior, there was a decrease in the number of followers in some of the tourist accounts. This reaction can happen due to two factors: either users are more demanding with the content they search on the web or there is an

influence of the current crisis on Twitter, which confers more than three years of inertia in this network<sup>2</sup>.

Despite the importance of Twitter as a platform for exchanging opinions in many countries around the world, it can be said that its reach in number of users is relatively modest. Twitter published its report in the second quarter of 2018, where it declared 355 million monthly active users worldwide, a figure that was slightly lower in the period from January to March<sup>3</sup>. Instagram reached 1 billion in June 2019 and Facebook surpassed 2,2 billion users.

In this study, Twitter recorded 346.213 interactions in 2015 and 1.016.338 in 2018. Such data demonstrates a change in the behavior of tweeters, as more interactions do not mean better interactions. In fact, in 2015, users were more involved, sharing content. But, in 2018, participation was limited to clicking on the “like” button. This is, moreover, a behavior proportional to that of organizations, which were less committed to the management of communication 2.0 in 2018. Ibero-American governments need to invest in strategic public relations planning in order to better understand their environment and their target audience.

Research has shown, in fact, that user participation is proportional to activity in organizations’ accounts. The greater the number of publications, the greater the interaction of users. However, an interesting variable was found: the quality of the published content. When there was a good content strategy, success on the network was ensured, therefore, the premise that less is more is confirmed and that adequate content management is necessary to reach users’ commitment (López de Ayala, Catalina & Fernández, 2018).

It was also concluded that there is strategic communication in the organizations analysed, with a plan regulated by objectives. The contents of traditional campaigns are “recycled” or content is produced in an improvised fashion and, consequently, their quality is compromised. In addition, there is a shift from excessive publication on some days to the absence of information on others, as mentioned by Paniagua and Huertas (2018b):

the personalization of tourist information and products is the future; destinations must program personalized products, depending on the type of audience and their different needs: traveling with children, young people, sun and beach, culture, escapades, etc.; and social media is an important channel to segment the offer. Therefore, it is important to know exactly through which social media each type of audience is reached and also to know exactly what information users are looking for. Thus, social media must be carefully selected, as well as the use of each and the content to be published. (p. 529)

For this reason, it no longer makes sense to think of communication as transmitting information. The publics are not only the recipient of the message, but they must be

<sup>2</sup> Retrieved from <https://es.statista.com/grafico/14930/usuarios-mensuales-activos-de-twitter-en-todo-el-mundo/>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <https://es.statista.com/grafico/14930/usuarios-mensuales-activos-de-twitter-en-todo-el-mundo/>

thought of as producers of information and as participants in the co-creation of content, becoming promoters of tourist destinations. Thus, communication strategies must be implemented in social networks that allow the establishment of relationships with the public, based on dialogue, interaction, and participation. Tourism companies cannot and should not become transmitters of information, but they must take an active role and listen to their audiences, in order to manage relationships that will strengthen the image and reputation of the tourist destination.

This work made it evident that communication 2.0 has not evolved in Ibero-America. Social media are still considered an exclusive platform for the transmission of information, without interaction with tourists. Therefore, it is not possible to talk about the development of public relations, because there is no involvement with consumers, but only the desire to keep them informed or to promote products or services. Such a context does not contribute to the construction of the image and reputation of the tourist destination, much less to its positioning.

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## **PUBLIC RELATIONS IN GROWTH HACKING STRATEGIES IN DIGITAL COMMUNICATION: THE CASE STUDIES OF WALLAPOP, WESTWING AND FOTOCASA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This work focuses on the strategic planning of public relations in well-known digital brands, based in Barcelona. This is the host city of the international technology fair “Mobile World Congress” and, at the same time, is in fifth place in Europe, in terms of the number of existing start-ups. The qualitative methodology, using the case study, was the research strategy used, which favoured triangulation in data collection through in-depth interviews and document analysis. Three brands founded on the digital environment were studied, whose activity is developed in the online environment. The results of the study showed that the public relations planning of the analysed digital brands is carried out in four stages: research, planning, implementation and evaluation. The public relations actions of these brands are integrated into marketing strategies and focus on advertising, content marketing and influence marketing actions, which combine creativity and analysis in order to achieve growth hacking goals. The strategies of these brands seek to achieve communication goals in the short term and the techniques used are guided by a management approach by objectives.

### **KEYWORDS**

public relations; growth hacking; content marketing; digital communication; influencer marketing

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## **RELAÇÕES PÚBLICAS EM ESTRATÉGIAS DE GROWTH HACKING NA COMUNICAÇÃO DIGITAL: OS ESTUDOS DE CASO DA WALLAPOP, WESTWING E FOTOCASA**

### **RESUMO**

Este trabalho debruça-se sobre o planeamento estratégico de relações públicas em marcas digitais de referência, que estão sediadas em Barcelona. Esta é a cidade anfitriã da feira internacional de tecnologia “Mobile World Congress” e, ao mesmo tempo, está em quinto lugar na Europa, no que respeita ao número de *startups* existentes. A metodologia qualitativa com o recurso ao estudo de caso foi a estratégia de investigação utilizada, a qual privilegiou a triangulação na recolha de dados através da realização de entrevistas em profundidade e da análise documental. Foram estudadas três marcas sustentadas no ambiente digital, cuja atividade se desenvolve no meio online. Os resultados do estudo mostraram que o planeamento de relações

públicas das marcas digitais analisadas é realizado em quatro etapas: a pesquisa, o planeamento, a implementação e a avaliação. As ações de relações públicas destas marcas estão integradas em estratégias de marketing e privilegiam ações de publicidade, de marketing de conteúdo e de marketing de influência, que combinam a criatividade e a análise a fim de se atingirem as metas de *growth hacking*. As estratégias destas marcas procuram atingir metas de comunicação a curto prazo e as técnicas utilizadas orientam-se por uma abordagem de gestão por objetivos.

#### PALAVRAS-CHAVE

relações públicas; *growth hacking*; marketing de conteúdo; comunicação digital; marketing de influência

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## INTRODUCTION

This study analyses the role of public relations in the communication strategies of the main digital brands in Barcelona, the city where the international technology fair “Mobile World Congress” is held and the fifth European urban centre with the largest number of start-ups<sup>1</sup>.

The case study was the method of investigation used, and the respective data were collected in the last three years, a time when communication processes were being rapidly redefined, due to the changes in the network society (concept that started being discussed by Castells, in 2001, standing as a good characterization for today’s society).

Studying public relations’ strategies for brands that are born and operate in the digital environment provides valuable knowledge to the field, since it allows an in-depth analysis of the way public relations professionals investigate, plan, implement and evaluate their actions. At the same time, it furthers the understanding on their aims.

This work also seeks to increase knowledge about growth hackers (Ellis & Brown, 2018), as a strategic element of public relations, by analysing how this technique is developed and implemented by brands that are born in the digital environment.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The essence of public relations has remained the same since the term was created by academics, to refer to professionals responsible for managing the relationships between an organization and its audiences (Bernays, 1923). However, the discipline is constantly evolving, since “new forms of communication and technology revolutionize its practice” (Wilcox, Cameron & Xifra, 2012, p. 6).

Thus, the study and practice of public relations become increasingly complex and closer to other areas, such as marketing communication and influence and content marketing (Aguilera, 2016). According to García Carballo (2012), the essence of marketing communication is the understanding that “users tend to reject any type of message with an explicitly commercial character, anything that looks like an advertisement and,

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<sup>1</sup> Retrieved from <https://2018.stateofeuropeantech.com>

in response, organizations turn to public relations, especially through social networks” (p. 145). Ries and Ries (2003) therefore emphasize the effectiveness of public relations in the new context of communication, thanks to their greater credibility when compared to advertising. In addition, they inspire the way marketing is oriented. As Armstrong and Kotler (2003) observe: “today, marketing must be understood, not in the traditional sense of selling, but in the sense of satisfying the client’s needs” (p. 5).

In fact, and as Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) infer, the digital environment has brought new communication models, which have been gradually emerging and which involve the public actively, as is the case with content marketing (Pulizzi & Barret, 2009; Pulizzi & Rose, 2017) and influence marketing (Katz & Lazarfeld, 1955; Rushkoff, 1994; Trusov, Bucklin & Pauwels, 2009).

As seen in the results of this study, the public relations actions that are implemented by the analysed digital brands are integrated in their marketing plans, which favour growth hacking (Ellis, 2010; Ellis & Brown, 2018): a multidisciplinary strategy whose main objective is to achieve growth, combining creativity and analysis. The term growth hacking emerged to define a multidisciplinary technique designed to achieve growth. Thus, a growth hacker is an individual whose true orientation is growth. This professional must be creative to discover unique ways to drive growth, in addition to testing and improving the techniques of other companies (Ellis, 2010).

The term growth hacking became popular outside the start-up ecosystem after it was used by Chen<sup>2</sup>. For him, the growth hacker is a professional who constantly asks himself how he can expand his business and answers this question in an analytical and creative way, with A/B tests, landing pages, viral techniques and content marketing strategies that create the search engine optimization (SEO), in addition to many other alternatives.

In fact, for Chen, growth hacking is not a function within an organization, but a philosophy that must characterize the marketing strategy, operating to win millions of users in a short time, since it is a possibility brought by the digital environment<sup>3</sup>.

The public relations strategy of the three brands studied is in line with the vision of growth hacking. In these cases, the principles of integrated marketing communication are privileged (Kotler, 2003; Schultz & Kitchen, 2000; Schultz & Patti, 2009), according to which public relations actions are planned and implemented in conjunction with other disciplines, such as advertising and digital marketing. The strategic planning of these actions therefore comprises the stages of research, planning, implementation and evaluation (Marston, 1963; Matilla, 2017; Wilcox et al., 2012), with the objective of meeting short-term communication goals.

It was noticed that, when digital brands execute the strategic planning of public relations, the research and evaluation phases are considered the most relevant. The research concerns the stage of the environment and people, so that it is possible to foresee the effects that actions can have (Cuenca, 2017). The assessment, which follows the

<sup>2</sup> See <http://andrewchen.co/how-to-be-a-growth-hacker-an-airbnb-craigslist-case-study/>

<sup>3</sup> Retrieved from <http://andrewchen.co/how-to-be-a-growth-hacker-an-airbnb-craigslist-case-study/>

action, compares the proposed objectives with the results obtained, seeking to learn new things and develop future lines of action (Marca, 2017). The focus of growth hacking is also found in assessment, which leads to learning (Ellis & Brown, 2018).

The data analysis thus follows the entire public relations strategic planning process, in line with the principle of growth and achievement of goals that characterizes the growth hacking vision.

Next, the study methodology is presented.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The investigation used a qualitative methodology, namely a case study, to explore the role of public relations actions in the growth hacking strategies of three brands that were born in the digital environment and located in Barcelona.

Respecting the selection criteria outlined, the brands had to have marketing and communication departments based in Barcelona and also had to be market leaders in their sector, as determined in an interview by Esteban Redolfi (Coll-Rubio & Mico, personal interview, 2016, November 18), CEO of 4YFN Mobile World Capital.

According to these criteria, the following case studies were selected:

- Wallapop, created in Barcelona in 2013, was the first Spanish application for buying and selling second-hand items, based on location;
- Westwing, created in Germany in 2011, was the first European e-commerce platform dedicated exclusively to the home and decoration segment; currently leads the Spanish furniture sales market;
- Fotocasa, a real estate portal created in 2004 by Adevinta, Spain's largest and most diversified classified ad and job offers company.

The triangulation of data was privileged through the use of three techniques: in-depth interviews; observation; and the documentary analysis of the content produced by the brands and their followers, between the years 2014 and 2018. The combination of these methods produced more reliable and complete empirical data.

As shown in Table 1, three stages of (successive) interviews were carried out to the professionals involved in the planning and implementation of the public relations strategies of the brands in question. These representatives were selected by the brands themselves, in order to meet the needs of the investigation. Thus, the following professionals were interviewed: Gemma Escribano, marketing director at Wallapop; Jessica Amador, Wallapop's director of public relations and social responsibility; Carlos Macho, content marketing manager at Wallapop; Beatriz Friol, marketing director at Westwing; Patricia Mas, Westwing's account director at the Interprofit communication agency; Montse Lavilla, Fotocasa's marketing director; Anaïs López, head of communication and press at Fotocasa; and Violeta Ruiz, head of content and communication with Fotocasa users.



STAGE 1 INITIAL INTERVIEWS	STAGE 2 GROUP INTERVIEWS	STAGE 3 FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE
Gemma Escribano, marketing director at Wallapop; Beatriz Friol, marketing director at Westwing; and Montse Lavilla, marketing director at Fotocasa	Gemma Escribano, marketing director at Wallapop; Jessica Amador, director of public relations and social responsibility at Wallapop; and Carlos Macho, content marketing manager at Wallapop  Beatriz Friol, director of marketing at Westwing; Patricia Mas, director of accounts at Westing at Interprofit; Anaïs López, head of communication and press at Fotocasa; and Violeta Ruiz, head of content and communication with users at Fotocasa	Gemma Escribano, marketing director at Wallapop; Beatriz Friol, director of marketing at Westwing; and Anaïs López, head of communication and press at Fotocasa

Table 1: Interviews carried out for the research

The first interviews, carried out during the first stage, were based on a set of open questions, namely: what are your responsibilities? What internal and external teams do you lead? How do you structure your department? How do you plan the communication of your brand? What are the communication objectives? What resources do you have to implement public relations actions? And what is the role of public relations in the brand strategy?

The second phase of interviews was conducted in a group, with the professionals responsible for implementing the public relations actions. The questions asked, also open, were the following: what are the brand’s communication objectives? What public relations actions are implemented and how? What role do public relations play in the brand strategy and what synergies exist with other fields of activity, such as advertising or digital marketing? How does the press office work? What professionals are involved in the implementation of the communication plans? What is the role of brand ambassadors? What is the role of influencers? How does the company coordinate the different professionals involved in advertising, digital communication and public relations? And how are the results measured?

The third and last stage of interviews aimed to gather the information collected in the previous two phases, in order to allow comparison. For this purpose, questions were elaborated based on the concepts of study and the data collected through document analysis and observation, which were being carried out in parallel. The following questions were then asked: how do you analyse, plan, implement and evaluate the brand’s communication actions? What is the role of research? Is your action based on previous data and information? What is the relationship between communication objectives and business objectives? How are these goals determined? How important is creativity in this process? Can planning be described in the short term? Are actions monitored in real time?

While the interviews were being carried out, the observation was made, which allowed to complete and interpret, in a more detailed way, the information provided by

the interviewees during the three phases. This observation period (three years) can be considered long term in the current economic context, which is rapidly evolving.

The interviews and observation were complemented with documentary analysis which, in addition to the notes and records of the interviews and observation, included the collection of 100.000 documents, of which more than 12.000 were analysed. Table 2 shows the different types of documents examined, many of which are directly related to the public relations strategies of the three brands.

TYPE OF DOCUMENT	NUMBER
Press materials (press releases and others)	26
Clipping	11.500
Communication with users (app, blogs and social media)	1.000

Table 2: Documental analysis

After gathering and comparing all information, it was categorized according to the concepts detected in the case studies, following the principles of grounded theory (or data-based theory), a methodology that allows a theory to be developed from the systematic data collection and analysis. Thus, the conclusions presented in this article show that the theory derives from the categorization of results through the “constant interaction between analysis and data collection” (Strauss & Corbin, 1998, p. 273). This is followed by the discussion.

## FINDINGS

The results of this investigation seek to describe the role of public relations in the growth hacking strategies of three digital brands: Wallapop, Westwing and Fotocasa. When analysing the strategic planning models of each of these brands, differences and similarities were found, which are presented below.

### CASE STUDIES

The three case studies discussed were analysed using data triangulation based on the three methods of data collection: in-depth interviews, observation and document analysis.

#### WALLAPOP

Wallapop was the first Spanish application serving as a medium to buy and sell products based on location. Founded in Barcelona in 2013, the platform sells second-hand items, allowing users to sell objects they do not use to people close to them.

Wallapop's public relations strategy follows the four-step RACE model<sup>4</sup> (Marston, 1963): research, planning, implementation and evaluation. Research is a fundamental step in the strategy of this brand, since the decisions taken before the implementation of any action are always based on data, as shown by the information collected in the case study.

The second step in Wallapop's strategy, then, is planning, in which clear, quantifiable, realistic and timed objectives are defined, before choosing the appropriate means to carry out the action. To meet the need for speed, Wallapop's communication plans are prepared only a few months in advance. In order to provide the necessary flexibility, the brand has a horizontal, dynamic, innovative and multidisciplinary structure. According to the marketing director, Gemma Escribano,

speed is a must in start-ups. For us, long-term planning would be about six months, in the medium term of three or four months and, finally, short term of one or two months. New companies, such as Wallapop, tend to have highly horizontal structures, which ensures the sharing of knowledge, while encouraging everyone to innovate, making everyone feel involved in the project. Wallapop's multidisciplinary communication team is able to adapt the message to different channels, making the most of its synergy.

In this regard, Jessica Amador, communications director at Wallapop, stated that: "there are no double roles, everything is combined. For example, we have a professional who manages communication in the application, another who is responsible for the relationship with influencers and other people who manage the content of each channel".

After planning, Wallapop starts the implementation phase of actions, which is carried out based on a 360° communication strategy, combining advertising campaigns with public relations actions focused mainly on advertising and marketing communication. Escribano explained how brand communication actions are carried out:

Wallapop has a 360° strategy, which combines all possible channels, making the most of each one. Currently, the digital medium is the priority, although traditional channels also work well. Television, for example, works very well for Wallapop. Combining means promoting all channels at the same time and improving the company's metrics.

The 360° communication strategy of this brand therefore includes a vision of growth hacking, which includes advertising campaigns and actions, as well as marketing communication and influence marketing, bringing together all possible online and offline channels to obtain better results in the evaluation.

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<sup>4</sup> Strategic planning model used in digital marketing, whose initials correspond to its four phases: reach; act; convert; engage.

## **WESTWING**

Westwing.es is a home décor portal, which belongs to the Westwing Group GmbH, founded in Germany in 2011 by the decoration expert Delia Fischer. It was the first European e-commerce platform dedicated exclusively to home décor and, today, it is a leader in furniture sales in Spain.

Westwing's public relations planning also follows the four-steps of the RACE model (Marston, 1963). The first step, research, is based on the large amount of data generated by e-commerce. The information is analysed in order to maximize the chances of success in the communication actions. In general, this planning is carried out annually, although the actions are outlined quarterly, since the brand needs a quick reaction time. The objectives proposed by Westwing aim to increase brand awareness among the target audience, which is made up of buyers of decorative items and their influencers. In the words of its marketing director, Beatriz Friol, "Westwing generally plans its public relations actions annually. However, detailed actions are prepared quarterly to give us a faster reaction time".

Regarding strategy, Westwing bets on creating relevant content in all types of formats, in order to position itself as a market leader. For this, it has its own internal press advisory team, composed of journalists and photographers who work exclusively in the production of content, which are published daily on social networks and in newsletters. The communication strategy of this brand then combines digital content marketing with online and offline advertising campaigns and with public relations actions. Like Wallop, actions at Westwing are also planned and executed in an integrated manner, with a 360° vision and with a focus on growth hacking, which uses creativity and takes advantage of the synergy between channels to achieve the best recognition of the brand with customers.

Finally, the fourth stage of Westwing's communication strategy is the evaluation, which includes continuous and real-time monitoring of the actions being implemented in order to assess the return on the investment made.

## **FOTOCASA**

The Fotocasa real estate portal was created in 2004 after the merger of the Anuntis and Vivendum portals. It belongs to Schibsted Spain, the largest and most diversified classifieds company in Spain.

Fotocasa's public relations strategy focuses on growth hacking techniques and strategic planning, following too the RACE four-step model (Marston, 1963).

All brand communication plans start with research, since most of their projected communication actions are based on data collection. Some of this data is obtained through samples designed to reach a percentage of the target audience and, thus, guarantee an early measure of its effectiveness.

Then, the action planning is prepared based on the communication objectives that are defined annually and aligned with the company's objectives. But action planning is also carried out on a quarterly basis. In addition, Fotocasa still has a tactical plan, designed to meet sudden needs. The decision-making process is flexible and the brand strategy seeks to take advantage of the synergy between the planned actions and the actions carried out, with a vision that also fits into the concept of integrated communication, and which is evolving towards growth hacking.

The essential factor in Fotocasa's planning is the coordination of advertising and public relations actions in a beneficial way. In the words of the company's head of communication, Anaïs López,

these actions are synergistic. Not a single action is taken without thinking about how it can affect or be used in any area. There is a lot of coordination between the teams. We try to interconnect all areas so that actions are coordinated and designed in the same spirit.

Fotocasa's communication plan is thus implemented through a combination of public relations actions – including press relations, content marketing and influence marketing – and advertising (online and offline) and presents a 360° view with a focus on growth hacking.

Finally, the results of communication actions are constantly monitored and considered when planning new actions, according to the spiral established in the RACE model (Marston, 1963). To assess the effectiveness of its actions, Fotocasa defined the following metrics: monthly top of mind, ROI (return rate) and share of voice (which measures the brand's impact on its audience).

## **CATEGORISATION**

As established in the methodology section, following the principles of grounded theory, the results of the investigation were categorized into concepts related to the strategic planning of public relations.

After categorization, connections were observed with the creation of the 360° strategy in all stages of the interviews conducted with representatives of the three companies. The strategic planning of public relations coincides between the brands and corresponds to the RACE model of four stages: research, planning, implementation and evaluation (Marston, 1963). The growth objective, centred on the growth hacking approach, is also present in all case studies.

The public relations actions carried out by the brands, fall within the scope of marketing communication, according to the classification of ADECEC (2008), with emphasis on advertising, content marketing and influence marketing. In all the case studies, there was integrated planning through the implementation of public relations, publicity and marketing actions.

CATEGORY	WALLAPOP	WESTWING	FOTOCASA
360° Strategy	X	X	X
Research	X	X	X
Planning	X	X	X
Implementation	X	X	X
Evaluation	X	X	X

Table 3: Categorisation

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The results of this investigation show that the public relations actions carried out by the digital brands present in the study are part of their marketing planning, which has a vision of growth hacking, focused on achieving growth through creativity and data analysis.

In terms of strategy, the results of the study reveal the presence of the four main pillars in the public relations strategic planning process: research, planning, implementation and evaluation. The actions implemented by the brands in question focus on achieving short-term communication objectives, which privilege communication techniques responsible for managing intangible assets.

Conducting research and evaluating the results are key factors in the public relations' actions of the analysed brands. All decisions are driven by the data collected and analysed. As a result, the three companies adjust their strategic planning, which is flexible and dynamic.

However, this study did not find significant influence from other areas, such as reputation, institutional relations or crisis communication, in public relations strategies. This can be explained by the short-term plans that characterize the strategies of these brands, and that do not allow working on issues such as organizational reputation.

Still, the results of the investigation showed that all public relations and marketing actions are planned and executed in a coordinated and integrated manner. Digital brands operate in a context in which speed and change are the watchwords and, therefore, plans are almost always thought out in the short term. This type of planning requires highly coordinated multidisciplinary teams, with a collaborative and flexible culture (Mintzberg, 1979). In addition, the observed leadership style is characterized by management by objectives (Drucker, 1954), and leads exactly to the RACE model of strategic planning (Marston, 1963), with particular interest in data-based decision making, which is driven by digital tools.

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