

Introduction

Public Relations on the international stage. Academic discipline and professional reality

Marc Compte-Pujol

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
mcomptepuj@uoc.edu

Joan Cuenca-Fontbona

Blanquerna – Universitat Ramon Llull
joancf@blanquerna.url.edu



Recommended citation: COMPTE-PUJOL, M. and CUENCA-FONTBONA, J. (2022). “Introduction. Public Relations on the international stage. Academic discipline and professional reality”. *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 1-5. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3608>>

This monograph entitled *Public relations on the international stage. Academic discipline and professional reality* introduces a selection of highly topical and scientifically interesting research on the theory and practice of public relations in various parts of the world.

Public relations is characterised by being both a highly sought-after professional activity throughout the world (Dühning, 2015; Puentes-Rivera, Hernández-Martínez and Cuenca-Fontbona, 2020) and also a highly specialised and complex academic sub-field of communication, with multiple theoretical perspectives that coexist today (Botan and Taylor, 2004; Compte-Pujol, 2016; Fawkes, 2018). Notable among them is the functionalist or managerial perspective initiated in the final decades of the 20th century with the work of Cutlip, Ferguson and Grunig, among others, according to whom the term “public relations” could be considered a synonym for “communication management” (Míguez and Baamonde, 2011).

Although in some areas public relations is still exclusively associated with publicity and media relations, the truth is that it also includes corporate and institutional communication, strategic planning and the implementation of communication, internal communication, lobbying, investor relations, marketing communication, issues management, crisis communication, event

planning, protocol and ceremony, fundraising, public diplomacy and many other sub-specialties (Caldevilla-Domínguez, Barrientos-Báez and Fombona-Cadavieco, 2020; Fawkes, 2018; Míguez, 2013; Xifra, 2014).

In the academic world, public relations is a vast toolbox of techniques, tools and knowledge for managing any type of communication need in any organisation, whether public or private. The term is still the most widely used by researchers in organisational and strategic communication throughout the world, and is used by several specialised academic journals, multiple conferences and various international associations, such as the European Public Relations Education and Research Association (EUPRERA) in Europe or the Asociación de Investigadores en Relaciones Públicas (AIRP) in Ibero-America, among others. However, in the professional sphere, the term *public relations* seems to be in clear decline over recent years in comparison to newer concepts such as *strategic communication*, *integrated communication*, *communication management* or *corporate communication*, among others (Dühring, 2015; García, 2016; Míguez, 2013; Moreno, Navarro and Zerfass, 2012; Puentes-Rivera, Hernández-Martínez and Cuenca-Fontbona, 2020).

For this monograph, the eight articles have been divided into three sections based on Dühring's (2015) division of the three schools of thought in public relations that are considered predominant today.

In the first section, public relations is understood as a synonym for strategic communication, with a clear orientation towards management studies and business economics. Research within this domain focuses on the management of the communicative function of organisations and on communicative processes, without subscribing to the *Grunigian* paradigm that has been predominant for decades. Here, we present two papers focusing on the management of internal communication, the specialisation of organisational communication that has grown the most in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic (Dircom, 2022) and which is managed either by communication departments or, in many cases, by human resources departments (Cuenca and Verazzi, 2020). The first article is entitled "The function of internal communication during the COVID-19 health crisis: Transformation or transubstantiation?" and is by professors Joan Cuenca-Fontbona from the Universitat Ramon Llull in Barcelona, Marc Compte-Pujol from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya and Mariana Sueldo from the ISM University of Management and Economics in Lithuania. The text analyses the evolution of internal communication before, during and after the pandemic from a fundamentally qualitative point of view, through in-depth interviews with internal communication directors or communication directors of large multi-sectoral Spanish companies. The second article, "The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The perception of communications executives in companies: The role and challenges of internal communication" by professors Cristina Aced Toledano from the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya, Susana Miquel Segarra from Jaume I University of Castellón and María-Cruz López-de-Ayala from the Rey Juan Carlos University of Madrid, examines

internal communication during the pandemic, but in this case from a quantitative point of view.

In the second section, following Dühning's (2015) classification, the articles discuss public relations that go beyond the *Grunigian* paradigm. These texts focus on the humanities and critical theory, investigating the consequences of the practice of public relations on society in general and on minorities when seen as a discursive force capable of shaping the values and social and cultural beliefs that legitimise certain interests over others. Two articles focus on this area, one on the historical evolution of the psychology of public relations, and the other on the impact of public relations on happiness and well-being. The article entitled "Historical evolution of public relations psychology in Europe and the United States" is by Professor Rocío Torres-Mancera of the University of Málaga, while "Bibliometric analysis and network mapping of the scientific literature on the influence of public relations on well-being and happiness" is by professors Dolores Rando-Cueto, José Manuel Núñez-Sánchez, Carmen Jambrino-Maldonado, Patricia P. Iglesias-Sánchez and Carlos de las Heras-Pedrosa from the University of Málaga.

The third and final section features four articles that fall within the more traditional research and practice of public relations since the 1980s, what Dühning (2015) calls corporate communication, close to professional practice and clearly application-oriented. This is a field that correlates with traditional themes and research interests: the tactical and practical skills of communication professionals, alignment with communication departments, and communication tools. The first article in this section, "Advertising and public relations degrees: profiles and the glass ceiling in the Spanish labour market" is by Gloria Jiménez-Marín from the University of Seville, Víctor Álvarez-Rodríguez from the University of Cádiz and Isabel Palomo-Domínguez from the Mykolas Romeris University. The text combines the traditional university-business binomial, focusing on the gender perspective as part of what is popularly known as DEI (diversity, equality and inclusion) concepts, which are increasingly important in the professional practice of communication management (Meng et al., 2021; Zerfass et al., 2022).

The second article, "The scope of crowdfunding in responsible university relations", by Ana Ibáñez-Hernández, Carmen Carretón-Ballester, Javier Esclapés and Maria José Rodríguez-Jaume from the University of Alicante, focuses on one of the fundraising techniques that has experienced the greatest growth in recent years – crowdfunding – and applies it to the particularly complex organisational context of the university. Given that the ultimate purpose of public relations is to lay the foundations for building mutual trust between audiences and organisations, the discipline makes more sense and is more active than ever in practices such as crowdfunding, which is based on building trust between multiple funders. In relation to the paramount importance of trust in general, it is worth noting that most public relations practitioners in Europe and Asia-Pacific consider that building and maintaining trust remains the top strategic issue to address in their work (Mcnamara et

al., 2021; Zerfass et al., 2022). All this in an environment of a permanent crisis in global trust towards virtually all types of organisations that is growing year after year (Edelman, 2022).

The third article, “The current role of influencers in public relations: Comparing Spain and the USA” by Carmen Máiz-Bar and Javier Abuín-Penas of the University of Vigo, compares the two countries in relation to one of the main objectives of the discipline: influence. The purpose of persuasion continues to be a reality of the discipline, although nowadays it is more common to see public relations as a practice that facilitates mutual influence between organisations and their publics, understood as active subjects who seek to achieve their goals in accordance with their own interests (Oliveira and Capriotti, 2019).

The fourth and final article, “We have an Ondas Award and a lot of anxiety: Engagement strategies and parasociality of the *Estirando el chicle* podcast” by Lucía Caro Castaño and Lourdes Gallardo Hurtado from the University of Cádiz, is framed within the progressive digitalisation of communication processes and their tools, a fundamental trend that concerns both communication departments and consultancies and agencies (Álvarez-Nobell, Molleda and Zerfass, 2021; Cuenca-Fontbona, Matilla and Compte-Pujol, 2020; Cuenca-Fontbona, Compte-Pujol and Zeler 2022; Dircom, 2022; Mcnamara et al., 2021), to the point that ComTech is increasingly key (Zerfass et al., 2022).

We hope you enjoy reading them.

Bibliographical references

- ÁLVAREZ-NOBELL, A., MOLLEDA, J.C. and ZERFASS, A. (2021). “Crisis del Covid-19 en la gestión de comunicación, ciberseguridad, situación de las mujeres, retos éticos y nuevas competencias”. *Latin American Communication Monitor*, 2020-21. Retrieved from <<https://latincommunicationmonitor.com/informes/>>.
- BOTAN, C.H. and TAYLOR, M. (2004). “Public Relations: State of the Field”. *Journal of Communication*, 54 (4), 645-661.
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2004.tb02649.x>>
- CALDEVILLA-DOMÍNGUEZ, D., BARRIENTOS-BÁEZ, A. and FOMBONA-CADAVIECO, J. (2020). “Evolución de las Relaciones Públicas en España. Artículo de revisión”. *El profesional de la información*, 29 (3), e290305.
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.05>>
- COMPTE-PUJOL, M. (2016). “Revisión y clasificación de los paradigmas científicos de las relaciones públicas del s. XXI”. *Opción*, 32, No. Especial 9, 371-386.
- CUENCA-FONTBONA, J., COMPTE-PUJOL, M. and ZELER, I. (2022). “La estrategia aplicada a las relaciones públicas en el medio digital: El caso español”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 80, 163-182.
<<https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2022-1537>>
- CUENCA-FONTBONA, J., MATILLA, K. and COMPTE-PUJOL, M. (2020). “Transformación digital de los departamentos de relaciones públicas y comunicación de una muestra de empresas españolas”. *Revista de Comunicación*, 19 (1), 75-92.
<<https://doi.org/10.26441/RC19.1-2020-A5>>

- CUENCA, J. and VERAZZI, L. (2020). *Comunicación Interna Total. Estrategia, prácticas y casos*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC.
- DIRCOM (2022). *ECE 21-22 El estado de la comunicación en España*. Madrid: Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación (Dircom).
- DÜHRING, L. (2015). "Lost in translation? On the disciplinary status of public relations". *Public Relations Inquiry*, 4 (1), 5-23.
- EDELMAN (2022). *Edelman Trust Barometer 2022. The Cycle of Distrust: Global Report*. Retrieved from <<https://www.edelman.com/trust/2022-trust-barometer>>.
- FAWKES, J. (2018). "The evolution of public relations research – an overview". *Communication & Society*, 31 (4), 159-171.
- GARCÍA, C. (2016). "Is the field of corporate communications trying to kidnap public relations?". *Journal of Professional Communication*, 4 (2), 59-74.
- MCNAMARA, J., LWIN, M.O., HUNG-BAESECKE, C.F. and ZERFASS, A. (2021). *Asia-Pacific Communication Monitor 2020-21. Strategic issues, competency development, ethical challenges and gender equality in the communication profession. Results of a survey in 15 countries and territories*. Hong Kong, Brussels: APACD, EUPRERA. Retrieved from <<http://www.communicationmonitor.asia/media/APCM-2020-21-Report.pdf>>.
- MENG, J., REBER, B.H., BERGER, B.K., GOWER, K.K. and ZERFASS, A. (2021). *North American Communication Monitor 2020-21. The impact of COVID-19 pandemic, ethical challenges, gender issues, cybersecurity, and competence gaps in strategic communication. Results of a survey of 1,046 communication professionals in the U.S. and Canada*. Tuscaloosa, AL: The Plank Center for Leadership in Public Relations. Retrieved from <<http://plankcenter.ua.edu/north-american-communication-monitor/>>.
- MÍGUEZ, M.I. (2013). "De las relaciones públicas a los nuevos conceptos de la comunicación: problemas terminológicos". *Orbis. Revista Científica Ciencias Humanas*, 9 (26), 125-142.
- MÍGUEZ, M.I. and BAAMONDE, X.M. (2011). "La evolución de las relaciones públicas hacia la dirección de comunicación: Aproximación histórica en el contexto académico español". *Razón y Palabra*, 75, febrero-abril.
- MORENO, Á., NAVARRO, C. and ZERFASS, A. (2012). "Relaciones Públicas, un término desacreditado en España y el resto de Europa. Conclusiones del European Communication Monitor 2011". *Hologramatica*, 16 (2), 115-140.
- OLIVEIRA, A. and CAPIROTTI, P. (2019). "El propósito de las relaciones públicas: De la persuasión a la influencia mutua". *Comunicació: Revista de Recerca i d'Anàlisi*, 36 (2), 53-70.
<<https://doi.org/10.2436/20.3008.01.184>>
- PUNTES-RIVERA, I., HERNÁNDEZ-MARTÍNEZ, S. and CUENCA-FONTBONA, J. (2020). "Relaciones Públicas y asociacionismo académico en España: AIRP, la Asociación de Investigadores en Relaciones Públicas". *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, 20 (10), 27-46.
<<https://doi.org/10.5783/revrrpp.v10i20.682>>
- XIFRA, J. (2014). *Manual de relaciones públicas e institucionales*. Madrid: Tecnos.
- ZERFASS, A., MORENO, A., TENCH, R., VERČIČ, D. and BUHMANN, A. (2022). "Exploring diversity and empathic leadership, CommTech and consulting in communications. Results of a survey in 43 countries". *European Communication Monitor*. Brussels: EUPRERA/EACD.

The function of internal communication during the COVID-19 health crisis: Transformation or transubstantiation?*

Joan Cuenca-Fontbona

Blanquerna – Universitat Ramon Llull

joanfc@blanquerna.url.edu

Marc Compte-Pujol

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya

mcomptepuj@uoc.edu

Mariana Sueldo

ISM University of Management and Economics

mariana.sueldo@ism.lt



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: November 2022

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: CUENCA-FONTBONA, J.; COMPTE-PUJOL, M. and SUELDO, M. (2022). "The function of internal communication during the COVID-19 health crisis: Transformation or transubstantiation?". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 7-26. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3553>>

Abstract

To find out whether the role of internal communication was transformed or transubstantiated as a result of the situation caused by the COVID-19 health crisis, a series of structured interviews with communication managers were held from the most severe period of lockdown (April 2020) until the end of the fifth wave (June 2021), with the aim of examining whether the function of internal communication in organizations had been affected by this health crisis and if so, to what extent. Internal communication as a managerial function underwent adaptation and adjustments, for which organizations had no ad hoc existing manuals or guidelines to follow *in stricto sensu*, because the nearest precedent comparable to the current situation occurred over a century ago and within a completely

* This paper has been partly financed by a grant from the Lithuanian Research Council and European Investment Funds Nr.: 09.3.3-LMT-K-712, as part of the post-doctoral research project "Towards an assessment model for mission-based strategic communication excellence".

different economic context. The pandemic has led to a marked digitization of internal communication channels, the dissemination of contents focused on health, well-being and safety of employees, alignment with the team, transparency, sustainability and diversity, with the express aim of providing emotional support and forging an image of security. It has also become an accelerating factor from a strategic perspective. Furthermore, new gaps have emerged, such as the need for employee self-management, along with managerial challenges posed by ambiguity, privacy, data accuracy and security and work-life balance in the teleworking context. All these concerns imply and require the direct involvement of internal communication to tackle them and find solutions. Yet what has changed is the various ways the internal communication function displays itself, but not the substance of the discipline. Thus, continuity in the strategic management of this function is crucial for its further development as an essential contribution for facing current and upcoming challenges.

Keywords: corporate communication; internal communication; COVID-19; health crisis; pandemic; public relations

Resum. *La funció de la comunicació interna durant la crisi sanitària de la COVID-19: ¿transformació o transsubstanciació?*

Per esbrinar si el paper de la comunicació interna ha patit una transformació o una transsubstanciació com a conseqüència de la situació provocada per la crisi sanitària de la COVID-19, s'han realitzat una sèrie d'entrevistes estructurades amb els responsables de comunicació des del període més sever del confinament (abril de 2020) fins al final de la cinquena onada (juny de 2021), amb l'objectiu d'examinar si la funció de comunicació interna a les organitzacions es va veure afectada per aquesta crisi sanitària i, si és així, fins a quin punt. La comunicació interna com a funció directiva ha experimentat adaptacions i ajustos davant unes situacions per a les quals les organitzacions no tenien manuals o directrius *ad hoc* existents a seguir *stricto sensu*, perquè el precedent més proper comparable a la situació actual es va produir fa més d'un segle i en un context econòmic completament diferent. La pandèmia ha comportat una marcada digitalització dels canals de comunicació interna, la difusió de continguts centrats en la salut, el benestar i la seguretat dels empleats, l'alineació amb l'equip, la transparència, la sostenibilitat i la diversitat, amb l'objectiu exprés de donar suport emocional i forjar una imatge de seguretat. També s'ha convertit en un factor accelerador des d'una perspectiva estratègica. A més, han sorgit noves llacunes, com la necessitat d'autogestió dels empleats, juntament amb els reptes de gestió plantejats per l'ambigüitat, la privadesa, la precisió i seguretat de les dades i l'equilibri entre la vida laboral i la vida personal en el context del teletreball. Totes aquestes inquietuds requereixen la implicació directa de la comunicació interna per abordar-les i trobar-hi solucions. Tanmateix, el que ha canviat són les diferents maneres en què es mostra la funció de comunicació interna, però no la substància de la disciplina. Així doncs, la continuïtat en la gestió estratègica d'aquesta funció és fonamental per al seu desenvolupament posterior com a contribució essencial per afrontar els reptes actuals i futurs.

Paraules clau: comunicació corporativa; comunicació interna; COVID-19; crisi sanitària; pandèmia; relacions públiques

Resumen. *La función de la comunicación interna durante la crisis sanitaria del COVID-19: ¿transformación o transsubstanciación?*

Para saber si el papel de la comunicación interna ha sufrido una transformación o una transsubstanciación a raíz de la situación provocada por la crisis sanitaria del COVID-19,

se han realizado una serie de entrevistas estructuradas a responsables de comunicación desde el periodo más severo del confinamiento (abril de 2020) hasta el final de la quinta ola (junio de 2021), con el objetivo de examinar si la función de comunicación interna en las organizaciones se vio afectada por esta crisis sanitaria y, de ser así, en qué medida. La comunicación interna como función gerencial ha experimentado adaptaciones y ajustes ante unas situaciones para las cuales las organizaciones no contaban con manuales o directrices *ad hoc* existentes a seguir en sentido estricto, pues el antecedente más cercano equiparable a la situación actual ocurrió hace más de un siglo y en un contexto económico completamente distinto. La pandemia ha supuesto una marcada digitalización de los canales de comunicación interna, la difusión de contenidos centrados en la salud, el bienestar y la seguridad de los empleados, la alineación con el equipo, la transparencia, la sostenibilidad y la diversidad, con el objetivo expreso de brindar apoyo emocional y forjar una imagen de seguridad. También se ha convertido en un factor acelerador desde una perspectiva estratégica. Además, han surgido nuevas brechas, como la necesidad de autogestión de los empleados, junto con los desafíos gerenciales que plantean la ambigüedad, la privacidad, la precisión y seguridad de los datos y el equilibrio entre la vida laboral y la vida personal en el contexto del teletrabajo. Todas estas inquietudes requieren la implicación directa de la comunicación interna para abordarlas y encontrar soluciones. Sin embargo, lo que ha cambiado son las diversas formas en que se muestra la función de comunicación interna, pero no la sustancia de la disciplina. Por ello, la continuidad en la gestión estratégica de esta función es crucial para su posterior desarrollo como contribución fundamental para afrontar los retos actuales y futuros.

Palabras clave: comunicación corporativa; comunicación interna; COVID-19; crisis sanitaria; pandemia; relaciones públicas

1. Introduction

With the COVID-19 crisis, the world has changed and, consequently, so have concepts, beliefs and processes, as well as many of the established ideas regarding internal communication (IC) (Ruck and Men, 2021; Verazzi, Padrós and Vallmajor, 2022). The pandemic may have meant accidental (not essential) transformations in IC, or substantial alterations in its essence, i.e. a transubstantiation (Aquino, 2001). Consistent with Aquinas's postulate, the accidental transformation of the function of IC would lead to resilience and adaptation by workers, while transubstantiation could cause confusion and helplessness, turning the discipline into a new function with new demands in terms of profiles and skills.

Taking IC as an independent and strategic function, the aim of this study is to explore whether the IC function has undergone accidental or substantial changes as a result of the health crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. *The function of internal communication*

When a function is young and in full evolutionary phase, finding a unanimous purpose is never simple, and such is the case with internal communica-

tion (Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018; Tkalac, Verčič and Sriramesh, 2012). This confusion is consistent with the fact that even in companies of considerable size it is a function that does not have a large number of people dedicated exclusively to it, nor a large budget (ASCAI and FEIEA, 2018; Dialenga, 2021; Gallagher, 2022); furthermore it is scattered across communication, human resources and marketing; and it is even subordinated to the dominant coalition (Aced-Toledano and Miquel-Segarra, 2021; Aced, Arocas and Miquel, 2021; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018; Dialenga, 2021; Gallagher, 2022; Tkalac et al., 2012). Yet all academics and practitioners agree that IC is a function focused on internal audiences that is one of the fastest growing specialisations of public relations as an essential element in the preservation of corporate culture and change management, and always aligned with the corporate objectives of the organisation (Berceruelo, 2020; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018; Hume and Leonard, 2014; Meng and Berger, 2012; Mishra, Boynton and Mishra, 2014; Theaker, 2022; Tkalac et al., 2012; Yaxley and Ruck, 2015).

The original IC function was to promote and develop a fluent relationship between people, and to facilitate the circulation and exchange of information concerning the organisational mission (Frank and Brownell, 1989). Now, however, IC is becoming a highly professionalised two-way strategic praxis in organisations and in the field of consultancy services and specialised agencies (Aced-Toledano and Miquel-Segarra, 2021; Cowan, 2017; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018, 2020; Dahlman and Heide, 2021; FitzPatrick and Valskov, 2014; Karanges et al., 2015; Men and Bowen, 2016; Men and Yue, 2017; Miquel-Segarra and Aced, 2018, 2019; Verčič, Čorić and Vokić, 2021; Zerfass and Viertmann, 2016). In brief, it has evolved into a fundamental activity to cement and maintain a psychological contract based on trust and employee engagement (Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2020; Qin and Men, 2022; Ruck, 2020; Ruck and Men, 2021; Santoso, Sulistyaningtyas and Pratama, 2022; Yeomans and Carthew, 2014; Xifra, 2020; Zerfass et al., 2017, 2019, 2021). It helps achieve organisational differentiation, efficiency and innovation, and address reputational challenges (Berceruelo, 2020). What is more, it is a tool for building community, for creating and maintaining a desired and useful level of satisfaction and performance (Sinčić, Pološki and Tkalac, 2020; Tkalac and Spoljarič, 2020; Berceruelo, 2020), and for influencing and relating to these internal publics (Aced-Toledano and Miquel-Segarra, 2021; Cutlip, Center and Broom, 2006; Aced et al., 2021; Tkalac, Sinčić and Pološki, 2021; Theaker, 2022).

In sum, IC is a strategic function that segments internal audiences, determines objectives aligned with corporate objectives, is attentive to the concerns, key interests and expectations of employees, generates content, designs communication actions and makes decisions on channels, distributes the budget, and develops the evaluation process (Aced et al., 2021; Álvarez-Nobell and Lesta, 2011; Berceruelo, 2020; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2018, 2020; FitzPatrick and Valskov, 2014; Theaker, 2022).

2.2. The role of internal crisis communication

Organisations have usually focused on external communication (Heide and Simonsson, 2019), while communication efforts in a crisis scenario have also mainly concentrated on its external consequences (Strandberg and Vigsø, 2016). However, the contribution of IC can also be decisive in the face of a crisis situation, which constitutes a threat to the survival of the organisation, or at least to the development of its activities (Berceruelo, 2020; Coombs, 2015; Kim, 2018; Mazzei and Butera, 2021; Mazzei, Kim and Dell'Oro, 2012; Santoso et al., 2022).

When people are faced with changes in their known environment, they need clues to help them decipher what is happening, and to understand how it will affect them and how they can cope with these changes. In these situations, audiences actively seek information through different channels, according to their concerns and needs (Kim et al., 2019). The same is true within an organisation, so IC is a lever that helps prevent crises, minimises damage and conveys the most appropriate information (Mazzei et al., 2012). Thus, the responsibility for vulnerability, risk and crisis communication extends to IC, in addition to the disciplines of public affairs or digital communication (Theaker, 2022). In a critical situation, IC involves all those communicative processes that take place between managers and employees, or between co-workers themselves, before, during and after such a scenario (Heide and Simonsson, 2019).

2.3. The role of internal communication during the coronavirus pandemic

On 11 March 2020, the World Health Organisation (WHO) officially classified the COVID-19 virus as a global pandemic. The evolution of the pandemic and its management was different in all affected countries, but personal and professional habits were altered to a greater or lesser extent in all of them. For the people responsible for communication in organisations, the spread of COVID-19 did not fit into any known strategic crisis communication model (Xifra, 2020). Nor was it a catalogued crisis (Coombs, 2020), so there was no precedent on what kind of solutions could have been formulated. There were only a few previous studies that addressed measures on how to optimise the communication process in another health crisis, the Ebola crisis in Spain (González, Medina and Iglesias, 2017), or to deal with events such as the financial crisis of 2008-2009 (Mazzei and Ravazzani, 2015), internal fraud (Strandberg and Vigsø, 2016), or the communication approach in the event of the death of an employee due to an accident at work (Mazzei et al., 2012).

Although this health crisis had no precedent in the extant typologies of crisis, the WHO itself stated that communication expertise was as essential as epidemiological training (World Health Organization, 2005). In such circumstances, organisational executive teams needed, on the one hand, to stay

well connected with their employees to ensure the correct linkage with objectives, and to provide guidance in the face of the procedural, technological and structural changes that were taking place. At the same time, they also needed information, reassurance and support (Ruck and Men, 2021; IC Kollektiv, 2020). An uncertain context required flexibility and speed in decision-making, along with a great deal of transparency, agility and credibility (Horney, Pasmore and O'Shea, 2010). All this in its turn demonstrated the need to make specific investments in strong and solvent virtual solutions (Cuenca-Fontbona, Compte-Pujol and Zeler, 2022).

Seen from a transformational hypothesis, it can be postulated that, against the context of the coronavirus health crisis, the role of IC in organisations adapted and intensified in the face of the new work situation for employees; and constructed frameworks and narratives within temporal settings that were sensitive and accommodating to the events as they unfolded, thereby strengthening identification with the organisation and the sense of legitimacy and collective belonging. Based on this approach, two objectives and three research questions were formulated.

3. Objectives

The main objective of this research was to find out whether the role of IC in the organisations examined has been transformed or transubstantiated as a result of the situation caused by the COVID-19 health crisis. A secondary objective was to find out what new challenges the discipline must face.

This study was based on three research questions:

1. RQ1. What was the role of internal communication before the coronavirus pandemic?
2. RQ2. Has the role of internal communication changed during the coronavirus pandemic?
3. RQ3. What are the challenges for the role of internal communication since the coronavirus pandemic?

4. Methodology

First, the literature specialising in public relations and corporate communication was reviewed, and specifically, that which deals with IC and internal crisis communication. Then a semi-structured interview was designed, tested and conducted with a sample of experts selected for their professional profiles.

4.1. Sample

The interviews were conducted by videoconference, within the framework of distance research methods (Lichtman, 2006), between April 2020 and June

2021, using a purposive sampling approach of N=30 functional communication or IC managers with more than five years of experience. The sample size was determined by the saturation principle. All participants were members of Dircom, the Association of Directors of Communication.¹ Given Dircom's high level of representativeness, this constitutes a quality sample. Contact information was obtained from the latest Dircom 2017 public directory, and contacts were obtained, one by one, from various sources and by hand (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005).

Informants from locations in Spain with the highest business presence (Madrid, Barcelona, Valencia, Seville and Bilbao) who matched the inclusion criteria and were aged between 36 and 57 years old were invited to participate.

4.2. Questionnaire and qualitative analysis

To create the interview, a review of the scientific literature was performed and a Mini-Delphi (Landeta, 2006) was designed and conducted with five experts in this area of knowledge, both professionals and academics.

The interview was derived from the objectives and research questions. The phases of interview development were conducted according to Gillham (2001): the interview script was prepared, the questionnaire was pilot tested with six people, refined, then the 30 interviews were conducted and transcribed. Finally, the information was analysed, and a preliminary report was written.

The questionnaire of 23 open-ended questions was divided into three blocks. The first section requested information on the structure of the communication department, as well as details of the performance and influence of IC before the health crisis. The second section dealt with this function during the pandemic. The last section invited reflection on the future direction of the discipline.

Next, the three stages of qualitative content analysis were deployed: pre-analysis; exploitation of the material using Atlas.ti; and processing results to formulate meaningful interpretations (Gibbs, 2007). This analysis was conducted collaboratively by three researchers to ensure stability and inter-observer reliability.

5. Presentation of results and discussion

5.1. The role of internal communication before the coronavirus pandemic

The number of people dedicated to IC in the large Spanish companies analysed varies from between one and five, or exceptionally more than five peo-

1. Dircom association is the most representative professional association of communication managers in Spanish companies, institutions and consultancy firms: <<https://www.dircom.org/>>

ple, data that coincide with the reports by ASCAI and FEIEA (2018), Dialenga (2021) and Gallagher (2022). Furthermore, 63.3% of these companies have a specific IC department, compared to 36.6% which integrate this function into the communication or human resources departments. The figures in Table 1 are significantly higher than those reported by ASCAI and FEIEA, or in the 2018 Spanish-level study by Dircom (cf. Aced et al. 2021). In either case, responsibility for IC is concentrated at headquarters, often with a small number of people solely to carry out IC work with a local criterion.

Table 1. Typology of internal communication management in large Spanish companies

Type of structure	Percentage
Internal department	82.35%
In-house department + outsourcing	5.89%
Outsourcing	11.76%

Source: author.

83.3% of these organisations manage IC autonomously, 6.6% combine internal management and outsourcing, and 10% have this work outsourced, information consistent with that reported earlier in the Dialenga report (2021) (Table 2).

Table 2. Presence of a dedicated internal communications department in large Spanish companies

Dedicated IC department	Percentage
Yes	64.7%
No	35.3%

Source: authors.

The results of the study show important similarities in the views expressed by communication department professionals with respect to the role and responsibilities of IC. In the first instance, they assert that IC is responsible for keeping all employees informed of everything relating to the company. Moreover, IC contributes to the correct execution of work, and preserves compliance with rules, all according to the transmission-oriented model as described by Cuenca and Verazzi (2018, 2020), Heide and Simonsson (2019) and Zerfass et al. (2021). Other day-to-day issues that are of interest and bring value to employees also fall under the umbrella of IC, namely: the corporate credo; decisions about goals; corporate and business management; organizational change; structural movements; incidents and solutions; development, training and knowledge; new projects and initiatives; financial results; and future programs, etc.

Before, during and after the pandemic, the function has been, is and will be the same: to keep all employees informed. (Informant 15, IC, commerce and distribution manager)

But these organizations also understand that IC is part of the motivational and satisfaction processes aligned with the company's values. Thus, they also describe it as the guarantor of employee empowerment and of strengthening their leading role in all the company's transformation processes.

[IC should be an integral part of all processes] to take a very active role in the transformation of [the organization], that is why we try to be present and engaged in company all projects. (Informant 7, Dircom, Construction, Iron and Steel, Energy and Electricity)

IC is responsible for fostering employee engagement and support, which they call employee engagement or associate engagement, and they assert that it has a significant influence on the decision to stay or leave an organization relating to morale, success, growth, corporate reputation or an enriching culture.

Keeping employees engaged and protecting the company's reputation are the main objectives of IC. (Informant 4, Dircom, Commerce and Distribution)

This model, based on dialogue and linkages, facilitates the transparent and smooth circulation of information, and makes the habits of sharing, coordinating, collaborating, engaging, integrating and involving all employees in the same business project viable. This view correlates with the most current literature research on IC (Berceruelo, 2020; Cuenca and Verazzi, 2020; Qin and Men, 2022; Ruck and Men, 2021; Tkalac, 2021; Theaker, 2022; Lee, 2022).

5.2. The role of internal communication during the coronavirus pandemic

There was total unanimity (100%) regarding the fact that during the period studied no structural changes took place. Instead, pressure on the role of IC can be observed in terms of the demand for greater contact with staff; the need to circulate information and advice to deal with and reduce any concerns or sense of isolation; digital training; and fostering dialogue, transparency and trust in performance (Verazzi et al., 2022; Aced-Toledano and Miquel-Segarra, 2021; Theaker, 2022).

The roles and responsibilities have not been modified, but the intensity may have increased because the cadence of everything that has been done in IC has increased. (Informant 4, Dircom, Commerce and Distribution)

Immersed in the pandemic, the people in charge of the companies studied also agreed (100%) that the function of IC had not changed as defined in

the literature, but the intensity of its performance and relevance within the companies had. They also explained that IC had assumed a coordinating role for all messages circulated, and that three priority areas of information had been identified as the main focus: protect the health and well-being of employees; maintain commitment and trust in the company; and reinforce leadership and business continuity. These priorities coincide with the findings of Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla (2020), Qin and Men (2022) and Santoso et al. (2022). During the period of crisis studied, workers were in a situation of maximum alert and uncertainty. For this reason, those responsible for IC faced the urgent need to provide members of their organizations with direct and transparent information, advice and instructions with agility and speed. The priority was their employees. Different mechanisms were also involved, in general to keep employees engaged, linked and connected to the organization, since some of the organizations included in this study had to close, in compliance with regulations and measures dictated by governmental bodies.

We had to coordinate everything that was issued [...]. People were in an uproar and what we had to do from IC was to eliminate uncertainties, transmit security, confidence and support, because suddenly we were all teleworking, but alone at home. We had two main priorities: to protect the health of our employees and clients, and business continuity [...] Every day until the State of Emergency was over, they received an e-mail with everything that was happening. (Informant 2, Dircom, Automotive, Transportation, Highways and Parking)

Although the health crisis was not among the main issues, 93.33% of the professionals interviewed stated that their organizations were trained to deal with any eventuality as, in the previous two years, they had prepared crisis manuals and contingency plans, and had also practiced numerous drills. Foresight was a determining factor in managing the new situation.

From minute zero a crisis committee was created with the communication department present, together with the lawyers, the CEOs and the positions of maximum responsibility. There have been decisions that have come from the communications department. (Informant 19, Head of IC, Commerce and Distribution)

Being on the crisis management committee was the key accelerator of IC work, according to 100% of the interviewees. Even so, 90% recognized that this presence had not led to an active and strategic role for IC, but rather a reactive and tactical one, due to the late incorporation of IC on those committees. Nevertheless, it encouraged the capacity to adapt and act quickly. The health crisis required a greater amount of time on the part of these professionals, and more resources. Circumstances precipitated the practice of IC, especially in the most severe phase of lockdown. On the other hand, from

mid-2021 and coinciding with the peak of the fourth wave (March 2021) and the beginning of the fifth wave (June 2021), IC evolved into a significantly more strategic exercise, which also coincided with the incorporation of new resources for its deployment.

With this health crisis, IC has acquired a very strategic role in the company [...] During the crisis we have realised the importance of IC [...] We have also reinforced some communication channels and we have interacted with departments with which, perhaps, we did not have so much interaction. (Informant 20, Dircom, Insurance)

All the organisations in the study had a crisis manual and an IC policy with established mechanisms, processes and responsibilities, including contingency plans at different levels. However, all (100%) informants recognised that with the pandemic, the manual has been built on the basis of the needs that had arisen, due to the lack of background information, for example, on the communication of a positive case, or on issues relating to the reorganisation of the company.

We have followed what we had in the crisis plans, multiplied by many times, because now the manual is no longer a crisis manual, but a day-to-day manual. (Informant 23, Dircom, Chemist and Pharmacist)

Eighty percent of the organisations set up active listening systems and established direct communication channels with management to facilitate the direct discussion of information received. Others designed questionnaires to verify the objectives of knowledge, understanding or action pursued by the actions being pursued. In other cases, daily videos or newsletters were created, with surveys to help check whether the information was being received correctly. Some organizations incorporated collective forums and webinars to gather employee opinions. Still others used the features of some Apps to ask questions and vote for decision-making among employees.

Overall, the situation caused by COVID-19 accelerated the need to invest in robust virtual solutions. 46.6% of the companies studied had strengthened the media ecosystem with new communication channels (informal and hierarchical WhatsApp and Zoom groups, or Yammer); there had been interaction with areas and departments that had not been so participative until then. In addition, a more emotional tone had been instituted in the content, in order to generate community, stimulate the sharing of any emerging issues and feelings among the staff, try to be closer, provide company and reduce loneliness. Instilling calm, security and encouragement in this type of situation had been the main challenges of IC during the pandemic. This is in line with the findings of Ruck and Men (2021) and the IC Kollektif report (2020).

In the same period, recruitment of additional IC professionals led to a 10-25% increase in their number. On the other hand, only 16.6% of the

organisations in the study increased the budget allocated to strengthening IC during this period.

5.3. The function of internal communication after the coronavirus pandemic

When asked about the challenges lying ahead for IC, all the cases studied declared that they had faced unknown scenarios that are now intermingled with the emergence of new key strategic objectives for IC deriving from the pandemic. These key strategic objectives are as follows:

- Provide employees, wherever they are, with clear, simple, useful and real-time answers, in order to reduce the uncertainty of the situation.

[...] it is necessary to share the information, to inform, to have the professionals informed, to say things when they happen and not to wait, that you should not wait, only if you do not know what to say or if the situation changes at minute one. That is, even if you change every day, communicate it. (Informant 23, Dircom, Chemist and Pharmacist)

The next step is to have an IC tool that brings together all the content that the brand generates and makes it available to employees in a much more dynamic way. (Informant 2, Dircom, Automotive, Transportation, Highways and Parking)

[...] Evolve from information to conversation. And this challenge leads to another challenge, which is managing misinformation. In addition to being able to give each employee the information they need, and to avoid “infoxication”, which can be due in large part to the generation of a lot of content of low interest. (Informant 27, Dircom, Financial Entities, Banks, Savings Banks, Managers)

- Offer essential training that enables employees to face the accelerated digital transformation that teleworking or hybrid work entails, informing them about the availability of technological tools and cybersecurity, and raising awareness of the ethical implications of accuracy in online interactions and data driven operations.

[...] Mainly knowing how to explain the transformation internally. We have a strategic plan that is transforming the organization and people must adapt to the changes. Things that we say were done one way today will be done differently tomorrow. Resilience and the ability to communicate internally are therefore important. (Informant 2, Dircom, Chemist and Pharmacist)

Explain the numerous changes at the level of organisational processes: digitalisation; sustainability issues and improvements in dependence on raw materials that need to be explained internally. Explain all our work on diversity and inclusion, we are a very large company with thousands of employees

all over the world, with a lot of geographical diversity, gender, etc. (Informant 17, Dircom, Audits, Consultants and Law Firms)

- Provide emotional support through content focused on health, well-being, gratitude and safety: mental and emotional health.

Leaders/people have realized that we can all be vulnerable, and I think this nearness and proximity will remain. (Informant 2, Dircom, Chemist and Pharmacist)

The respect and responsibility you have as a company are very important to make people feel good, because this enables them to continue working. Because obviously if the employee is well and feels motivated, the continuity of the business can be guaranteed. (Informant 19, Head of IC, Commerce and Distribution)

- Stimulate the worker through social innovation, collaboration, empathy, reliability and trustworthiness with the company's corporate actions.

It is also possible that communication and the informative tone will be relegated, and that a more empathetic, closer tone will be sought, and above all the effectiveness of internal communication. The company must continue to communicate corporate messages without them becoming bullshit or spam. (Informant 1, Dircom, Tourism)

A lot has been done, and there is still a lot of room for improvement. Above all, we want to engage the workshop staff, who believe more in the company. We are going to set ourselves the challenge of increasing commitment and pride in being a member of the organisation. Values Week and other team-building activities. (Informant 13, IC, Food, Beverages and Tobacco)

- Actively listen to the staff in order to discuss emerging issues of concern: the ambiguity of the situation, business continuity in a teleworking model, process optimization, hot desk offices, employee self-management and self-leadership, multi-tasking, heavier workloads that go hand in hand with increased amounts of stress, privacy, the redefinition of the work-life balance, the gradual return to offices, and the reasons behind decisions taken by the organization in the new situation.

[...] make opportunities out of the tools so that they help me to communicate with the worker in a personalised way, taking care of each worker individually. (Informant 15, IC, Commerce and Distribution)

- Informatively assist relatives and close friends of the company employees while they were on sick leave or were mourning the deaths of closed people who passed away during the pandemic.

[...] that the institution cannot remain in the global IC, that more and more you have to be one to one with the workers. It takes time, but you have to do it. It has been seen that each person experiences any situation in very different ways and this, which was already known, becomes even more important when you have to call them to express your condolences or to encourage them so that they don't feel alone. (Informant 29, Dircom, Culture)

- Seek to align employees with the company, continue transmitting the corporate creed, and reinforce the feeling and pride of belonging.

[...] Attracting and retaining talent. Seduce them at the beginning and keep them afterwards. Brand perception also plays a very important role here. The moment of truth in IC is in the day-to-day: how you look at me, what you do to understand and listen to me and what you do with what I am proposing to you. (Informant 17, Dircom, Auditors, Consultants and Law Firms)

IC helps us to overcome the difficulty of conveying the purpose, so that people understand the meaning of the decisions we make. (Informant 15, IC, Commerce and Distribution)

IC is a key lever for identity generation and sharing the company's culture. It helps to reinforce the feeling of being part of a common goal. (Informant 23, Dircom, Chemist and Pharmacist)

- Work on the communication skills of the dominant coalition and leadership as preventive or crisis preparedness practice.

IC must be the task of all the people in the organization, all must be internal communicators, especially the people who lead teams where there is still a long way to go in terms of awareness, training and culture of internal communication. (Informant 17, Dircom, Auditors, Consultants and Law Firms)

- Help shape and guide actions as well as orient decisions of the dominant coalition so that the messages they want and need to convey are clearly understood.

IC should facilitate the transmission of messages from the general directorate directly, with transparency, seeking to generate trust and clarity. (Informant 27, Dircom Financial Entities, Banks, Savings Banks, Managers)

- Arrange the organization's worldview around the digital environment and distance.

We have all become more digitalised, more teleworking, less contact... and this may have had a negative impact on engagement, but IC has helped to keep us together. The challenge, with its risk, was for the virtual to supplant the physical, which at the time was absent. (Informant 19, Head of IC, Commerce and Distribution)

6. Conclusions

The results obtained provided answers to the three research questions (RQs) linked to the previously established objectives.

In relation to RQ1, one of the first issues is related to the original role of IC, to circulate information, focusing on content and communication channels. Currently, this transmission-oriented model coexists with a people-centred communication model based on dialogue, networking and personal bonding.

Regarding RQ2, it was shown that the departments responsible for IC in organizations did not change their operations during the health crisis, but instead intensified their workload and increased their presence, as well as their strategic and leading role in decision-making, characterized by agility and readiness to attend to the fast-moving nature of the concerns, routines and new behaviours of employees. There are clear signs of a more human, relaxed and informal tone in the management of a remote, mediated professional presence, together with a more empathetic approach to improvisation to help solve domestic problems that affect the daily work of the employee.

There is agreement about the accidental (not substantial) transformation of IC due to the health crisis, i.e., the function adapted to a new reality without losing its essence. Thus, the objectives and topics of IC during the pandemic revolved around basic issues typical of these circumstances: the health, well-being and safety of employees. In turn, efforts were made to preserve trust and maintain the employee's feeling of identification and belonging to the company.

As for RQ3, the functions of IC were the same before and during the pandemic, although COVID-19 admittedly meant putting the employee at the centre of any decision, by promoting a climate for active communication behaviours to encourage knowledge sharing, collaboration and creativity. Certainly, the recent health crisis was an accelerating factor from a strategic perspective; it triggered the digital transformation of IC channels and compelled companies to face new concerns and make adjustments to corporate culture, with a new tone and style of communication towards internal audiences.

The aim of this research has been to enrich the literature on IC and internal crisis communication, along with some practical implications to help communication professionals and their departments to adapt and improve their IC in a health crisis.

7. Limitations and future lines of research

Despite the results obtained, this study has certain limitations. Firstly, neither the selected universe nor the sample analysed is representative of all Spanish companies or the IC managers who exercise their functional responsibility in Spain. This is due to the lack of a documented register to identify

the total population for sampling. Moreover, the type of research technique (interview) restricts comparative analysis or sectoral conclusions. Nevertheless, the number of interviewees provides an adequate basis to detect patterns in their responses corresponding to the practice of IC before and during the COVID-19 pandemic, and allows us to consider the results of the research as general trends in Spain.

As for future lines of research, it would be interesting to learn more about the type of decisions that those responsible for IC have been allowed to make, in order to understand the reasons behind the professional's actions relating to IC during the pandemic.

In addition, this research will be extended to IC professionals from organisations in other countries in order to contrast and correlate practices at an international level.

Bibliographical references

- ACED-TOLEDANO, C. and MIQUEL-SEGARRA, S. (2021). "La comunicación interna de las empresas españolas en clave estratégica". *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación / Mediterranean Journal of Communication*, 12 (2), 245-261.
<<https://www.doi.org/10.14198/MEDCOM.18692>>
- ACED, C., AROCAS, M. and MIQUEL, S. (2021). *Manual de Comunicación Interna*. Madrid: Dircom.
- ÁLVAREZ-NOBELL, A. and LESTA, L. (2011). "Medición de los aportes de la gestión estratégica de CI a los objetivos de la organización". *Palabra clave*, 14 (1), 11-30.
<<https://doi.org/10.5294/pacla.2011.14.1.1>>
- AQUINO, T. (2001). *El ser y la esencia* [AQUINAS, T., *On being and essence*]. Madrid: BAC.
- ASCAI and FEIEA (2018). *On the Wings of Corporate Strategy Current status and trends in internal communication in European companies*. ASCAI and FEIEA. Retrieved from <<http://feiea.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/EXECUTIVE-SUMMARY-ASCAI-RESEARCH-2018-ENGLISH-VERSION-c%C3%B3pia.pdf>>
- BERCERUELO, B. (2020). *Empleados comprometidos, empresas eficaces*. Madrid: Estudio de Comunicación.
- CASTRO-MARTÍNEZ, A. and DÍAZ-MORILLA, P. (2020). "Comunicación interna y gestión de bienestar y felicidad en la empresa española". *El profesional de la información*, 29 (3), e290324.
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.24>>
- COOMBS, W. T. (2015). "The value of communication during a crisis: Insights from strategic communication research". *Business horizons*, 58 (2), 141-148.
- (2020). "Conceptualizing crisis communication". In: HEATH, R. L. and O'HAIR, H. D. (Eds.). *Handbook of risk and crisis communication*. London: Routledge, 99-118.
- COWAN, D. (2017). *Strategic Internal Communication. How to build employee engagement and performance*. 2ª ed. London (UK): Kogan Page.
- CUENCA, J. and VERAZZI, L. (2018). *Guía Fundamental de la Comunicación Interna*. Barcelona: UOC.

- (2020). *Comunicación Interna Total*. Barcelona: Colección ircom-UOC.
- CUENCA-FONTBONA, J., COMPTE-PUJOL, M. and ZELER, I. (2022). “La estrategia aplicada a las relaciones públicas en el medio digital: El caso español”. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 80, 163-182.
<<https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2022-1537>>
- CUTLIP, S. M., CENTER, A. H. and BROOM, G. M. (2006). *Effective public relations* (9th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- DAHLMAN, S. and HEIDE, M. (2021). *Strategic Internal Communication*. London and NY: Routledge.
- DENZIN, N. K. and LINCOLN, Y. S. (2005). *The Sage Handbook of Qualitative Research* (3^a ed.). London: Sage.
- DIALENGA (2021). *Estado de la Comunicación Interna en España 2021*. Dialenga. Retrieved from <https://www.dialenga.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Dialenga_Estado_de_la_Comunicacion_Interna_en_Espana_2021.pdf>.
- FITZPATRICK, L. and VALSKOV, K. (2014). *Internal Communications: A Manual for Practitioners (PR in Practice)*. London (UK) / Philadelphia (USA): Kogan Page Limited.
- FRANK, A. and BROWNELL, J. (1989). *Organizational Communication and Behaviour: Communicating to Improve performance*. Orlando: Holt, Rinehart&Winston.
- GALLAGHER (2022). *State of the Sector 2022: global internal communication and employee engagement insights and trends*. Retrieved from <<https://www.ajg.com/employeeexperience/state-of-the-sector-2021/>>.
- GIBBS, G. (2007). *Analyzing Qualitative Data*. London: Sage.
- GILLHAM, B. (2001). *The Research Interview*. London: Continuum.
- GONZÁLEZ, A., MEDINA, P. and IGLESIAS, M. (2017). “Estrategia para la optimización de la comunicación de riesgo en la crisis del Ébola”. *Revista de Comunicación y Salud*, 7 (1), 173-186.
<[https://doi.org/10.35669/revistadecomunicacionysalud.2017.7\(1\).173-186](https://doi.org/10.35669/revistadecomunicacionysalud.2017.7(1).173-186)>
- HEIDE, M. and SIMONSSON, C. (2019). *Internal Crisis Communication: Crisis Awareness, Leadership and Coworkership*. London: Routledge.
- HORNEY, N., PASMORE, B. and O’SHEA, T. (2010). “Leadership agility: an imperative for a VUCA world”. *People & Strategy*, 33 (4), 32-38. Retrieved from <<https://luxorgroup.fr/coaching/wp-content/uploads/Leadership-agility-model.pdf>>.
- HUME, J. and LEONARD, A. (2014). “Exploring the strategic potential of internal communication in international non-governmental organizations”. *Public Relations Review*, 40 (2), 294-304.
- IC KOLLECTIF (2020). *COVID-19. Communication Repertoire. Resources for Communication Professionals*. Retrieved from <https://www.ickollectif.com/_files/ugd/9c88ca_02df1694e730499cb3c6672a93c238af.pdf>.
- KARANGES, E., JOHNSTON, K., BEATSON, A. and LING, I. (2015). “The influence of internal communication on employee engagement: A pilot study”. *Public Relations Review*, 41 (1), 129-131.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.12.003>>
- KIM, Y. (2018). “Enhancing employee communication behaviors for sensemaking and sense-giving in crisis situations. Strategic management approach for effective internal crisis communication”. *Journal of Communication Management*, 22 (4), 451-475.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-03-2018-0025>>

- KIM, Y., KANG, M., LEE, E. and YANG, S.-U. (2019). "Exploring crisis communication in the internal context of an organization: Examining moderated and mediated effects of employee-organization relationships on crisis outcomes". *Public Relations Review*, 45 (3), 101777.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2019.04.010>>
- LANDETA, J. (2006). "Current validity of the Delphi method in social sciences". *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 73 (5), 467-482.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.techfore.2005.09.002>>
- LEE, Y. (2022). "How dialogic internal communication fosters employees' safety behavior during the COVID-19 pandemic". *Public Relations Review*, 48 (1), 102156.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2022.102156>>
- LICHTMAN, M. (2006). *Qualitative Research in Education. A user's guide*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- MAZZEI, A. and BUTERA, A. (2021). "Internal Crisis Communication". In: L. R. MEN and A. TKALAC (Eds.). *Current Trends and Issues in Internal Communication: Theory and Practice*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 165-181.
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-78213-9>>
- MAZZEI, A., KIM, J.-N. and DELLORO, C. (2012). "Strategic Value of Employee Relationships and Communicative Actions: Overcoming Corporate Crisis with Quality Internal Communication". *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 6, 31-44.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2011.634869>>
- MAZZEI, A. and RAVAZZANI, S. (2015). Internal crisis communication strategies to protect trust relationships: A study of Italian companies. *International Journal of Business Communication*, 52 (3), 319-337.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525447>>
- MEN, L. R. and BOWEN, S. A. (2016). *Excellence in Internal Communication Management*. Business Express Press. Retrieved from <<https://www.perlego.com/book/403118/excellence-in-internal-communication-management-pdf>>.
- MEN, L. R. and YUE, C. A. (2017). "Strategic Internal Communication: Transformational Leadership, Communication Channels, and Employee Satisfaction". *Management Communication Quarterly*, 28 (2), 264-284.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0893318914524536>>
- MENG, J. and BERGER, B. K. (2012). Measuring return on investment (ROI) of organizations' internal communication efforts. *Journal of Communication Management*, 16 (4), 332-354.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541211278987>>
- MIQUEL-SEGARRA, S. and ACED, C. (2018). "El rol de la comunicación interna ante los desafíos de la digitalización". *Communication Papers*, 7 (15), 27.
<http://dx.doi.org/10.33115/udg_bib/cp.v7i15.22181>
- (2019). "Objetivos y dificultades en la evaluación de la comunicación interna en las empresas españolas". *Profesional de la Información*, 28 (5).
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.sep.21>>
- MISHRA, K., BOYNTON, L. and MISHRA, A. (2014). "Driving employee engagement: The expanded role of internal communication". *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51 (2), 183-202.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525399>>
- QIN, Y.S. and MEN, L.R. (2022). "Exploring the Impact of Internal Communication on Employee Psychological Well-Being During the COVID-19 Pandemic:

- The Mediating Role of Employee Organizational Trust". *International Journal of Business Communication*.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884221081838>>
- RUCK, K. (2020). *Exploring Internal Communication: Towards Informed Employee Voice* (4a ed.). London: Routledge.
- RUCK, K. and MEN, L.R. (2021). "Guest editorial: Internal communication during the COVID-19 pandemic". *Journal of Communication Management*, 25 (3), 185-195.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-08-2021-163>>
- SANTOSO, N. R., SULISTYANINGTYAS, I. D. and PRATAMA, B. P. (2022). "Transformational Leadership During the COVID-19 Pandemic: Strengthening Employee Engagement Through Internal Communication". *Journal of Communication Inquiry*.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/01968599221095182>>
- SINČIĆ, D., POLOSKI, N. and TKALAC, A. (2020). "Does good internal communication enhance life satisfaction?". *Journal of Communication Management*, 24 (4), 363-376.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-11-2019-0146>>
- STRANDBERG, J.M. and VIGSØ, O. (2016). "Internal crisis communication: An employee perspective on narrative, culture, and sensemaking". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 21 (1), 89-102.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-11-2014-0083>>
- TKALAC, A. (2021). "The impact of employee engagement, organizational support and employer branding on internal communication satisfaction". *Public Relations Review*, 47 (1), 102009.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102009>>
- TKALAC, A., SINČIĆ, D. and POLOSKI, N. (2021). "Measuring internal communication satisfaction: validating the internal communication satisfaction questionnaire". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26 (3), 589-604.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-01-2021-0006>>
- TKALAC, A. and SPOLJARIC, A. (2020). "Managing internal communication: How the choice of channels affects internal communication satisfaction". *Public Relations Review*, 46 (3), 101926.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101926>>
- TKALAC, A., VERČIĆ, D. and SRIRAMESH, K. (2012). "Internal communication: Definition, parameters, and the future". *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2), 223-230.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/J.PUBREV.2011.12.019>>
- THEAKER, A. (2022). *El Manual de Comunicación y Relaciones Públicas*. Barcelona: Profit.
- VERAZZI, L., PADRÓS, L. and VALLMAJOR, C. (2022). *Comunicación Interna de Pandemia*. Barcelona: Colección Dircom-UOC.
- VERČIĆ, A. T., ČORIĆ, D. S. and VOKIĆ, N. P. (2021). "Measuring internal communication satisfaction: validating the internal communication satisfaction questionnaire". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26 (3), 589-604.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-01-2021-0006>>
- WORLD HEALTH ORGANIZATION – WHO (2005). *WHO outbreak communication guidelines*. Geneva: WHO. Retrieved from <<https://www.who.int/publications/item/who-outbreak-communication-guidelines>>.
- YAXLEY, H. and RUCK, K. (2015). "Tracking the rise and rise of internal communication". In: RUCK, K. (Ed.). *Exploring Internal Communication* (3a ed.). London: Routledge.

- YEOMANS, L. and CARTHEW, W. (2014). "Internal Communication". In: TENCH, R. and YEOMANS, L. (Eds.). *Exploring Public Relations* (3^a ed.). Harlow: Pearson Education.
- XIFRA, J. (2020). "Comunicación corporativa, relaciones públicas y gestión del riesgo reputacional en tiempos del Covid-19". *El profesional de la información*, 29 (2).
- ZERFASS, A. and VIERTMANN, C. (2016). "The communication value circle. How communication contributes to business success". *Communication Director*, 3.
- ZERFASS, A., MORENO, Á., TENCH, R., VERČIČ, D. and VERHOEVEN, P. (2017). *European Communication Monitor 2017. How Strategic Communication Deals with the Challenges of Visualisation, Social Bots and Hypermodernity: Results of a Survey in 50 Countries*. Brussels: EACD/EUPRERA, Quadriga Media Berlin.
- ZERFASS, A., VERČIČ, D., VERHOEVEN, P., MORENO, A. and TENCH, R. (2019). *European Communication Monitor 2019. Exploring Trust in the Profession, Transparency, Artificial Intelligence and New Content Strategies. Results of a Survey in 46 Countries*. Brussels: EACD/EUPRERA, Quadriga Media Berlin.
- ZERFASS, A., BUHMANN, A., TENCH, R., VERČIČ, D. and MORENO, A. (2021). *European Communication Monitor 2021. CommTech and digital infrastructure, video conferencing, and future roles for communication professionals. Results of a survey in 46 countries*. Brussels: EACD/EUPRERA.

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The perception of communications executives in companies: The role and challenges of internal communication

Cristina Aced Toledano

Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
caced@uoc.edu

Susana Miquel Segarra

Universitat Jaume I
smiquel@uji.es

María-Cruz López-de-Ayala

Universidad Rey Juan Carlos
mariacruz.lopezdeayala@urjc.es



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: January 2023

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: ACED TOLEDANO, C., MIQUEL SEGARRA, S. and LÓPEZ-DE-AYALA, M. C. (2022). "The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic. The perception of communications executives in companies: The role and challenges of internal communication". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 27-43. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3559>>

Abstract

The Covid-19 pandemic has tested the role of internal communication (IC) in managing adaptation to change and digitalisation in companies, in the context of a sudden switch to implementing remote working, the reorientation and temporary interruption of activity and mass redundancies. With the aim of analysing the effect of Covid-19 on the assessment of corporate communication managers regarding the business environment and the challenges faced by IC departments in Spain, a statistical analysis compares data collected in 2018 and 2020 (N=118 and N=69 respectively) on the perceptions of members of Dircom (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación) [Association of Communication Executives]. In addition, a systematic analysis of the 2020 open questions is carried out. The results highlight an improvement in the perception that investment in IC is sufficient during the pandemic, although it remains among the worst rated aspects of the business context. Managing digital and media developments, linking IC with corporate strategy and strengthening the role of communication in decision-making are the greatest

perceived challenges, with no changes due to Covid-19. On the other hand, the majority of the respondents believe that Covid-19 is having a positive influence on IC, showing its importance for the proper functioning of the business during the pandemic, with an increase in its actions. More than half of the respondents appreciate that IC has driven business values and changes in the way these departments operate; two-thirds have learned lessons for their business; and almost three-quarters perceive that the incorporation of audiovisual and on-line media will continue.

Keywords: internal communication; perceptions; communication executives; pandemic; Covid-19 effects

Resum. *L'impacte de la pandèmia de COVID-19. Percepció dels professionals de la comunicació en les empreses: rol i desafiaments de la comunicació interna*

La pandèmia de COVID-19 ha posat a prova el rol de la comunicació interna (CI) en la gestió de l'adaptació al canvi i a la digitalització de les empreses, en una situació sobtada d'implantació del teletreball, reorientació i interrupció temporal de l'activitat i acomiadaments massius. Amb l'objectiu d'analitzar l'efecte de la COVID-19 sobre l'avaluació que els gestors de comunicació de les empreses fan de l'entorn empresarial i dels desafiaments que afronten els departaments de CI a Espanya, una anàlisi estadística compara les dades recollides el 2018 i el 2020 (N = 118 i 69, respectivament) sobre les percepcions dels socis de Dircom (Associació de Directius de Comunicació). A més, es fa una anàlisi sistemàtica de les preguntes obertes de 2020. Entre els resultats destaca la percepció que la inversió en CI millora durant la pandèmia, si bé continua entre els aspectes pitjor valorats de l'entorn empresarial. Manejar l'evolució digital i dels mitjans, unir la CI amb l'estratègia corporativa i enfortir el rol de la comunicació en la presa de decisions són els principals reptes percebuts, sense modificacions per la COVID-19. D'altra banda, la majoria valora que la COVID-19 influeix positivament sobre la CI, que mostra la seva importància per al bon funcionament empresarial durant la pandèmia amb un increment de les seves actuacions. Més de la meitat dels participants aprecien que la CI ha impulsat valors empresarials i canvis en el funcionament d'aquests departaments; dos terços n'han extret ensenyaments per a la seva activitat; i quasi tres quarts parts perceben que la incorporació de mitjans audiovisuals i en línia perduraran.

Paraules clau: comunicació interna; percepcions; professionals de la comunicació; pandèmia; efectes de la COVID-19

Resumen. *El impacto de la pandemia de COVID-19. Percepción de los profesionales de la comunicación en las empresas: rol y desafíos de la comunicación interna*

La pandemia de COVID-19 ha puesto a prueba el rol de la comunicación interna (CI) en la gestión de la adaptación al cambio y a la digitalización de las empresas, en una situación repentina de implantación del teletrabajo, reorientación e interrupción temporal de la actividad y despidos masivos. Con el objetivo de analizar el efecto de la COVID-19 sobre la evaluación que los gestores de comunicación de las empresas hacen del entorno empresarial y de los desafíos que afrontan los departamentos de CI en España, un análisis estadístico compara los datos recogidos en 2018 y 2020 (N = 118 y 69, respectivamente) sobre las percepciones de los socios de Dircom (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación). Además, se realiza un análisis sistemático de las preguntas abiertas de 2020. Entre los resultados destaca la percepción que la inversión en CI mejora durante la pandemia, aunque continúa entre los aspectos peor valorados del entorno empresarial. Manejar la evolución digital y de los medios, unir la CI con la estrategia corporativa y fortalecer el rol

de la comunicación en la toma de decisiones son los mayores retos percibidos, sin modificaciones por la COVID-19. Por otro lado, la mayoría valora que la COVID-19 influye positivamente sobre la CI, que muestra su importancia para el buen funcionamiento empresarial durante la pandemia con un incremento de sus actuaciones. Más de la mitad de los participantes aprecian que la CI ha impulsado valores empresariales y cambios en el funcionamiento de estos departamentos; dos tercios han extraído enseñanzas para su actividad; y casi tres cuartas partes perciben que la incorporación de medios audiovisuales y en línea perdurará.

Palabras clave: comunicación interna; percepciones; profesionales de la comunicación; pandemia; efectos de la COVID-19

1. Introduction

Internal communication (IC) has acquired strategic importance as a key element to achieve organisational success in an increasingly dynamic and changing environment (Ruck and Welch, 2012; Berceruelo, 2014; Ruck, 2020). IC has been approached from different disciplines (Araújo and Miranda, 2021) and linked to an improved organisational climate and employee–manager relationship, which favours various outcomes that support organisational effectiveness (Sinčić-Čorić, Pološki-Vokić and Tkalac-Verčič, 2020). Its contribution to the management of organisational change and complexity is also highlighted (Yeomans and FitzPatrick, 2017), and as a way to increase engagement (Welch, 2015; Mishra, Boynton and Mishra, 2014). In addition, it favours the sense of belonging and the external projection of corporate reputation (Welch and Jackson, 2007) by increasing staff motivation and cohesion and their alignment with the business objectives (Welch, 2015).

In recent years, communication executives have mostly perceived IC as one of the priority areas of specialisation that will achieve greater prominence in the future (Heide and Simonsson, 2011; Yeomans and FitzPatrick, 2017; Zerfass et al., 2011; Nelli, 2018; Dircom, 2018). However, Heide and Simonsson (2011) conclude that IC has low legitimacy within organisations and, in an emerging central issue such as leadership (Cornelissen, 2020), there is no perceived agreement in the role assigned to IC by managers and communication executives (Zerfass et al., 2014).

Within the scope of its practice in Spain, Miquel-Segarra and Aced-Toledano (2019) note that IC executives are achieving progressively greater autonomy in organisational structures. According to Nelli (2018), this is an indicator of the recognition that IC is an important activity that requires continuous and well-structured management. However, they conclude that IC still lacks its own identity in Spanish companies, to the extent that these executives must usually report to other departments. Multinational and large companies are the best positioned in this regard.

The Covid-19 pandemic has confronted organisations with a new and unforeseen situation in which IC could demonstrate its strategic role, and from

which important lessons for the future can be drawn (Xifra, 2020). For a long time, attention to the positioning of IC in organisations has been subsumed (and relegated) to the interest of theorists in the recognition of the status and conditions in which communication executives work in organisations. In this context, this study seeks to discover the effect of pandemics on this area of activity and its environment in organisations, from the perspective of the executives who work in this field.

2. Contributions and lessons from Internal Communication during the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic tested the role of IC in managing adaptation to change and digitalisation in companies, in the context of a sudden switch to implementing remote working, reorientating and temporarily interrupting activity, mass redundancies, and the establishment of new health and safety protocols (Neill and Bowen, 2021). This exceptional circumstance forced organisations to implement new communication channels and tools to facilitate the management of remote tasks and to keep employees informed. However, in this context of physical remoteness, there are also vital issues such as the loss of engagement or the disconnection of employees with the organisation's objectives and values (Fábregas, Tejedor and Salla, 2021).

Besides the communication requirements of implementing remote working, companies have had to inform employees about new health and safety measures to protect both their employees and their customers/users. And not only that: they have had to involve them in the adoption of remote working in times of confusion and in the face of sometimes contradictory and highly politicised messages from the authorities and experts (Tejedor et al., 2020). Therefore, beyond the aspects strictly linked to job performance, organisations have had to train employees to cope with the ambiguity and uncertainty of this situation of unplanned change (Sun et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021), to ensure their commitment to the organisation and their psychological well-being (Ruck, 2020).

In addition, Chon, Tam and Kim (2021) point out that employees may question the capabilities and ethics of their organisations and leaders to deal with the problems and consequences of the pandemic, despite being an external and uncontrollable crisis in which organisations find themselves as victims. The organisation's actions will be key to ensure that this situation does not lead to a crisis of confidence among employees, who may spread information which damages the organisation's reputation.

Several studies have supported the role of IC in managing organisations during the pandemic, providing knowledge applicable to crisis and change communication management. Sun et al. (2021) have demonstrated the role of symmetric IC in enhancing organisational identification, considering the intermediation of perceived quality of change communication, perceived organisational support and positive emotions during the change process.

Focusing on employee–organisation relationships, Ecklebe and Löffler (2021) point out the impact of the perceived quality of IC on trustworthiness, commitment and satisfaction; they highlight communication both at the beginning of and during the pandemic, substantive information, participatory communication and rejection of secrecy as key to this assessment. Moreover, Li et al. (2021) have explained the effectiveness of transparent communication in the quality of employee–organisation relationships by fostering proactive coping with change and reducing uncertainty.

On the other hand, Neill and Bowen (2021) have highlighted the crucial role of listening, in a context where increased moral sensitivity is critical to address employee concerns and build trusting relationships. Men, Qin and Jin (2021) also emphasise the latter aspect, and show the role of supervisory leadership communication in encouraging trust towards the leadership and the organisation. These authors consider that employees' psychological need for competence and relatedness are met through their supervisors' use of meaning-making, as well as through empathetic and direction-giving language.

In accordance with the challenges and opportunities that IC has had to face in this unprecedented context, the aim of this research is twofold. On the one hand, to analyse the changes that Covid-19 has brought about in the evaluation made by company communication managers of the business environment and the challenges faced by IC departments in Spain; and on the other hand, to gather their impressions regarding the effects that the pandemic has had on IC in companies. A further objective is to find out whether the views of the executives who manage IC are influenced by the size and territorial location of their companies.

3. Methodology

3.1. Design

Based on databases of the Spanish professional association Dircom (Asociación de Directivos de Comunicación) [Association of Communication Executives], which collects members' perceptions regarding the state of IC in Spain [Estado de la CI en España], two quantitative cross-sectional analyses were carried out, in 2018 and 2020. They focus on the business context and the priorities, problems and challenges of IC. In addition, a qualitative analysis of the 2020 data was conducted on the opinions of executives on the effects that the pandemic has had on companies' IC.

3.2. Population and sample

The population under study are members of Dircom, an association that brings together communication managers and executives from companies, institutions and consultancy firms in Spain. The sample was non-probabilistic by self-selection (Couper, 2000).

In 2018, out of a population of 1,022 members to whom the questionnaire was sent, 118 responded (a response rate of 11.5%). 45.8% of the participants worked at a multinational company based in Spain, and the remaining 54.2% at a national company. Regarding the size of the organisations, 72% of the participants worked at a large company (more than 250 employees), 9.3% at a medium-sized company (between 51 and 250 employees), 10.2% at a small company (between 11 and 50 employees) and 8.5% in a micro-company (between 1 and 10 employees).

In 2020, out of a population of 881 members, 69 questionnaires were obtained (a response rate of 7.8%). 59.4% of the participants belonged to a multinational company and 40.6% to a national company. Regarding size, 79.6% worked at a large company, 10.2% at a medium-sized company, 8.6% at a small company and 1.4% at a micro company.

3.3. Instruments

To collect the data in 2018, Dircom developed a structured questionnaire based on research previously conducted by the Italian IC Association (ASCAI) and the European Association of Internal Communication (FEIEA) (Nelli, 2018). The questionnaire consisted of 37 items organised under five headings: positioning of the IC team; their strategies, objectives and activities; their evaluation processes; the business context; and the priorities, issues and challenges they faced.

In 2020, the questionnaire was adapted to reflect the effects that Covid-19 was having on IC in Spanish companies. The questionnaire was reduced and redefined to a 20-item instrument, 15 of which covered the same five sections as the initial document, with five new, open-ended questions with reflections on the effects of the pandemic. All items were rated on a Likert scale (1 = *Strongly disagree* and 5 = *Strongly agree*), in relation to the last six months.

3.4. Procedure

In the first phase, data collection was conducted during the first quarter of 2018. The online questionnaire was sent to members and completed by the executives responsible for managing their company's IC. It took approximately 20 minutes to complete. In the second phase, data was collected during October 2020. The link to the online questionnaire was sent to members again for completion. In this case, it was expected to take approximately 15 minutes to complete. In both cases, the confidential and anonymous treatment of the information was guaranteed in accordance with Spanish Organic Law 15/1999 on the Protection of Personal Data.

3.5. Quantitative data analysis

To study the differences between the participants' evaluations in the two years, a Student's t-test for independent samples was applied and, considering the inclusion of the factors of the companies in which the respondents work (size or territorial scope), 2x2 between-subjects factorial ANOVAs were carried out for each criterion. The data was analysed using the statistical program SPSS, version 22, and the level of statistical validity was $p < .05$.

3.6. Qualitative analysis

After a process of analysis of the information collected in the qualitative items of the questionnaires, a system of codes was drawn up relating to the main discursive lines identified. Based on this coding scheme, the contents of the responses were examined to capture and transpose the experiences and considerations of the participants. The analysis of the information was carried out with the MAXQDA 2018 qualitative analysis program.

4. Results

4.1. Business context of IC departments

Table 1 shows the level of agreement that participants have with the items raised regarding the business context. The importance of IC channels, sense of belonging and integration between internal and external communication are the aspects of the business context most highly rated by participants in 2018 and 2020. However, employee participation in decisions that affect them, their role in networks as guarantors of the company and the company's commensurate investment in IC are the least rated issues (and do not reach the average value of 3).

Comparative analyses of the context indicators before and after the pandemic show that there are significant differences in evaluation only when it is stated that the company invests sufficiently in IC (from 2.41 to 2.86) ($t(185) = -2.481$; $p = .014$; $d = 0.38$); for the other items, although the scores are slightly higher, the differences are small and not significant.

Looking at the relative positions attributed to the items in each period, slight variations are observed in the ranking: during the pandemic, the assessment that employees have easier access to information necessary for their performance exceeds the degree of agreement of executives regarding the integration of internal and external communication. And something similar occurs with sufficient investment in IC, which exceeds the degree of agreement with the statement regarding the participation of employees as advocates of the organisation.

Other factors, such as the size of the organisation or the territorial scope in which the company operates, have been included in the analysis of the business environment. However, significant differences are only found in

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and t-tests for the business context items, in 2018 and 2020

	2018		2020**		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
Internal communication channels are very important	118	3.85 (1.18)	69	4.06 (1.06)	-1.222	.223
Employees feel proud to work for their company	118	3.82 (0.94)	69	4.03 (1.01)	-1.411	.160
Internal and external communication are perfectly integrated	118	3.81 (1.28)	69	3.91 (1.29)	-0.511	.610
Employees have easy access to key information to be able to perform their work properly	118	3.80 (1.10)	69	3.97 (0.99)	-1.088	.278
Employees have all the facilities to communicate directly with their managers	118	3.57 (1.20)	69	3.84 (1.15)	-1.524	.129
Employees have a good understanding of the company's goals and values	118	3.47 (1.15)	69	3.57 (1.06)	-0.534	.594
Employees see the link between their jobs and the company's objectives	118	3.45 (1.08)	69	3.57 (1.01)	-0.729	.467
The leaders of each team understand that communication is essential to their role	118	3.35 (1.18)	69	3.52 (1.11)	-0.997	.320
CEOs consider the communication aspect in each of their decisions and actions	118	2.99 (1.16)	69	3.09 (1.21)	-0.535	.593
Employees are involved in making decisions that directly affect them	118	2.94 (1.09)	69	3.07 (1.02)	-0.818	.415
Employees actively participate in networks and are relevant watchdogs for the company	118	2.56 (1.15)	69	2.64 (1.07)	-0.461	.646
The company invests enough in IC	118	2.41 (1.13)	69	2.86 (1.30)	-2.481	.014*

**p* < .05

Source: Own elaboration.

the item stating that internal and external communication are perfectly integrated ($F(1,183) = 4.131$; $p = .044$; $\eta^2_p = .022$), with the differences in 2018 ($p < .001$) being located between national companies and multinationals in which this integration is much greater (3.38 vs. 4.33).

4.2. Priorities, problems and challenges for IC departments

Table 2 shows the level of importance of the priorities, problems and challenges facing corporate IC in the medium term. Managing digital and media developments, linking IC to business strategy and strengthening the role of communication to support management decision-making are the most important challenges for participants in 2018 and 2020. In contrast, aspects more related to the social responsibility of IC, such as implementing a code

Table 2. Descriptive statistics and t-tests for the items referring to IC priorities, problems and challenges in the next three years, in 2018 and 2020

	2018		2020**		<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>M (SD)</i>		
Managing digital and media developments	118	4.27 (0.95)	69	4.22 (0.87)	0.385	.700
Linking IC with business strategy	118	4.26 (0.95)	69	4.25 (0.93)	0.115	.909
Strengthening the role of communication to support management decision-making	118	4.25 (0.85)	69	4.14 (0.97)	0.804	.422
Adapting to the volume and speed of information flow	118	4.08 (1.03)	69	4.07 (0.96)	0.025	.980
Reaching employees using mobile technology	118	4.05 (1.15)	69	4.07 (1.12)	-0.126	.900
Establishing new methods for assessing and demonstrating the value of communication	118	4.04 (0.99)	69	3.91 (1.11)	0.824	.411
Helping managers and team leaders to build their communication skills	118	3.97 (1.00)	69	3.94 (1.03)	0.213	.832
Adopting measures that inspire employees to create and share valuable content	118	3.94 (1.02)	69	3.86 (1.14)	0.529	.598
Integrating employee-generated content into corporate communication	118	3.88 (0.99)	69	3.70 (1.23)	1.069	.287
Addressing the demand for transparency and more active audiences	118	3.86 (1.02)	69	3.87 (1.06)	-0.087	.931
Implementing advanced monitoring and active listening strategies	118	3.80 (1.03)	69	3.81 (1.06)	-0.095	.925
Explaining the value of internal communication to managers	118	3.77 (1.23)	69	4.01 (1.08)	-1.413	.160
Combining the need to target more audiences and channels with limited resources	118	3.74 (1.09)	69	3.84 (1.15)	-0.614	.540
Teaching employees how to use social media to generate valuable content	118	3.66 (1.21)	69	3.48 (1.08)	1.038	.301
Achieving the integration of “digital natives”	118	3.61 (1.14)	69	3.54 (1.16)	0.425	.671
Replacement of print media by digital media	118	3.58 (1.19)	69	3.51 (1.28)	0.417	.677
Supporting multicultural integration	118	3.53 (1.17)	69	3.45 (1.27)	0.417	.677
Identifying sustainability policies in IC	118	3.45 (1.08)	69	3.61 (1.23)	-0.929	.354
Implementing a code of ethics for process and actions in IC	118	3.44 (1.31)	69	3.28 (1.16)	0.867	.387

Source: Own elaboration.

of ethics in IC, identifying sustainability policies in IC, and supporting multicultural integration, are considered less important, although they are scored above the average of 3.

Comparative analyses of these items before and after the pandemic show that there are no significant differences in participants' evaluations. However, differences in the relative position of the items assessed by the interviewees can be observed. It is worth noting that during the pandemic, digital and media developments are displaced by the link between IC and business strategy as the priority for the interviewees. Along the same lines, the concern to explain the value of internal communication to managers (from 9th to 3rd place), combining the need to address more audiences and channels with limited resources and identifying the sustainability policies of the IC process all move up several places in the ranking. By contrast, the challenge of integrating employee-generated content into corporate communication moves down a few places.

The results obtained do not reflect significant differences when we include in the analyses the size and territorial scope of the companies in which the participants work. The only exception is found in the priority of meeting the demand for transparency and more active audiences. In this area, significant differences were obtained in the interaction between the period of analysis and the size of the organisation ($F(1,183) = 4.487$; $p = .036$; $\eta^2P = .024$), with the differences during the pandemic ($p = .048$) being located between small and medium-sized companies and large companies, in which the relevance of this priority is lower (4.36 vs. 3.75).

4.3. How Covid-19 has influenced internal communication

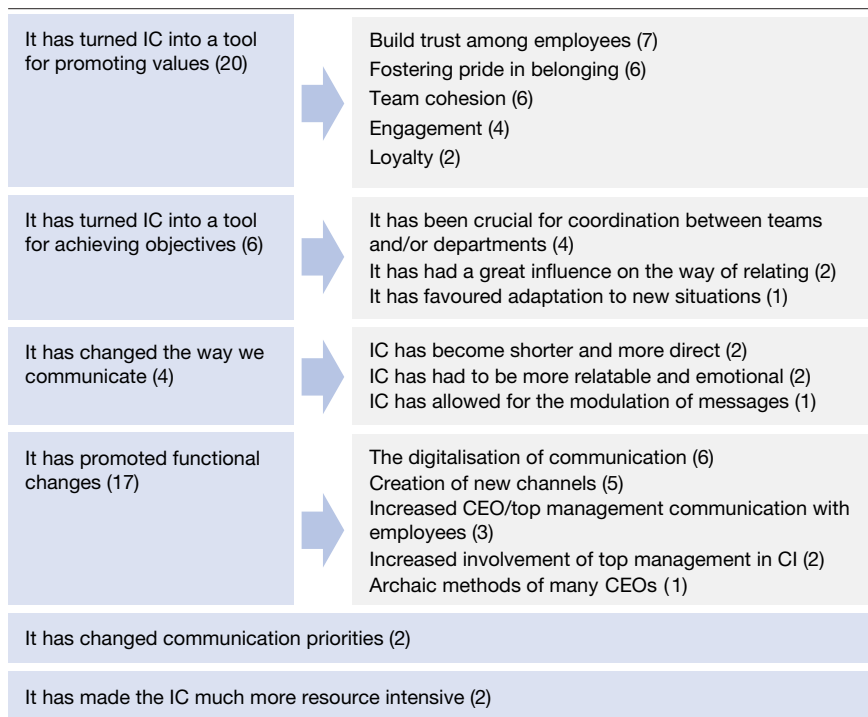
When analysing the perceptions of the participants in the 2020 qualitative research on the influence that the pandemic has had on IC, it can be seen that the majority, 84.3%, consider that Covid-19 has influenced and is influencing IC positively. Only 5.9% believe that it has had a negative impact, and 9.8% think that it is having a strong influence on IC, but without assessing whether that influence is positive or negative.

The main reasons used to argue for the positive influence are that the pandemic has shown the importance of IC, IC has been essential for the good functioning of the company in the current situation, and the pandemic has increased IC actions. The negative arguments they put forward are that Covid-19 has led to a lack of budget for communication, and that more attention has been paid to other issues. Moreover, for those who do not rate the influence of the pandemic on IC, this is either because they think it has had a variable effect or because it is not clear what needs to be communicated in this context.

Figure 1 shows the aspects of IC that have been influenced by Covid-19. In detail, more than half of the participants consider that IC has become a tool to promote the company's values. However, only six of them consider

that it has become a tool through which they can achieve their goals. It is worth noting that almost half of those who consider that Covid-19 has promoted changes say that these changes are reflected in the functioning of IC departments and, above all, in the involvement of senior management.

Figure 1. Aspects of IC that participants believe have been influenced by Covid-19



Source: Own elaboration.

4.4. Covid-19 lessons for IC

Participants in the qualitative research (2020) perceive that there are four types of lessons to be learned from the pandemic (Figure 2). The most frequently mentioned lessons are those related to work. Participants have discovered, on the one hand, priorities that companies have (such as digitalisation, remote working, collaboration, etc.); on the other hand, attitudes that agents must have (adaptation, flexibility, etc.) and, moreover, shortcomings of companies (such as the lack of crisis management teams, etc.). It is also interesting to highlight the lessons that refer to the discipline of IC. In this regard, they highlight that the pandemic has served to emphasise its strategic role, as well as the need for clarity, speed and transparency.

Figure 2. Lessons learned by the participants during Covid-19

Related to work in general (37)	
Priorities (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of digitisation (9) Work works (5) Importance of collaboration between groups (3) Imagination and a good team are the most important thing (2) It is good to combine remote working and face-to-face work (1) A lot can be done with very little if the objective is clear (1) Cultural processes can be accelerated (1) The importance of a job well done (1) Finding the balance between digitalisation and humanisation (1)
Attitudes (19)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adaptability (16) Importance of flexibility (5) Importance of dynamism (2) Looking to the future with positivism (1)
Deficiencies (6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Need for crisis team with experts from all areas (3) Need to regulate remote working (1) Corporate speeches are useless if the facts do not go hand in hand (1) Instability must have indicators (1)
Related to objectives and strategies (4)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plans and strategies are provisional (3) Focus on what you bring to the table, a differential value (1) 	
Related to the work team (13)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Importance of emotional management and human relations (7) Importance of employee autonomy (3) Staff need to feel a sense of security from superiors (2) Training communication staff (1) Importance of trained spokespersons (1) Can be united online (1) 	
Related to internal communication as a discipline (17)	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communication has been strengthened and has a strategic role (13) Clarity, speed and transparency are essential (3) Importance of IC and EC (1) Communication is still not strategic in business (1) Lack of business culture regarding the role of communication (1) Importance of crisis communication (1) 	

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to analyse the impact that Covid-19 had had on IC, using the evaluations made by IC managers. The results allow us to make interesting observations regarding the effects that Covid-19 has had on the IC of Spanish companies. In the opinion of all the experts, this pandemic was an opportunity to demonstrate the value of IC in organisations (Xifra, 2020). However, IC made very little progress during the pandemic.

First, we could say that the business context prioritises a tactical and non-strategic use of IC. This idea can be seen in the responses that the executives interviewed gave concerning the importance of IC channels as one of the key aspects of the context. On the other hand, they recognise that investment in the area of IC is the aspect that is most lacking. This situation improved slightly during the pandemic, and is an indicator that companies tried to formulate a response to this unprecedented scenario. However, as Miquel-Segarra and Aced-Toledano (2019) note, these data also show the lack of importance and the low strategic weight that this area is still given in organisations. This argument is strengthened if we note in the results that the views of executive directors of communication is still not very representative in decision-making. In this sense, we can say that there has been an improvement in one of the requirements demanded by IC executives (Miquel-Segarra and Aced-Toledano, 2019).

Second, the data reveal that employee participation, whether on social networks or in decision-making, continues to be at the bottom of the ranking of indicators that describe the business context, a context that is seldom participative and where two-way communication and internal dialogue is scarce. Nevertheless, and as an indicator that was highly valued by the interviewees, greater involvement and participation of top management is observed during the period of the pandemic. At the same time, although with minimal variation, during the pandemic there was an improvement in the evaluation of employees regarding the ease of accessing the information necessary for them to do their work. These data are consistent with the efforts made by companies to report on the effects of the pandemic on different aspects of employees' working lives. It has placed value on transparency, and demonstrates the contribution of internal communication in managing organisational change and complexity (Yeomans and FitzPatrick, 2017).

Third, it should be noted that the majority of those interviewed believe that Covid-19 is having a positive influence on IC, showing its importance for the proper functioning of the company, as well as an increase in its activity. In this sense, more than half of the executives appreciate that IC has boosted business values, and 4 out of 10 affirm that it has promoted changes in the functioning of IC departments. In addition, executives consider that they have learned lessons for their activity, and even consider that some changes will last over time (e.g. the incorporation of audiovisual and online media).

Fourth, the results reveal the existence of a series of common challenges. Aspects such as monitoring and adapting to digital and media changes, linking IC with corporate strategy, or strengthening the role of communication in decision-making are the most prominent. Although the mean difference test does not allow us to conclude that there are significant differences in the ratings of these challenges, significant changes are observed in the relative position that different items occupy in the ranking. Thus, it is observed how the need to link IC with business strategy becomes the key challenge during the pandemic.

The fifth relevant contribution of the research is along the same lines. Even though Covid-19 is considered to have served to highlight the strategic nature of IC, it has also made executives aware of the need to point out the value of IC in their own organisations. In this sense, it can be seen how the concern for explaining the value of IC to managers is growing, climbing six positions in the ranking, into the Top 10. In contrast, and even though digitisation and employee engagement are important objectives before the arrival of the pandemic, more tactical issues, such as integrating content generated by employees into corporate communication, and teaching employees to use social networks to generate valuable content, are objectives that lose importance.

In short, Covid-19 was an unprecedented crisis, in which the role of internal communication as a tool for managing the ambiguity and uncertainty faced by employees was reinforced (Sun et al., 2021; Li et al., 2021). In this sense, the IC carried out during the pandemic prioritised the generation of trust in the organisation and its leaders through transparency and the use of emotional communication, as Chon, Tam and Kim (2021) argue. However, although communication executives perceived the opportunity to reclaim the strategic role of communication vis-à-vis top management, the efforts of organisations seem to have been oriented towards the reorganisation and coordination of remote work. And although the physical distance produced by work could affect engagement and could disconnect employees from the organisation's objectives and values (Fábregas et al., 2021), it is still not presented as a priority objective.

Among the limitations of the study, it is worth mentioning the self-selected nature of the sample, which limits the generalisation of the results, and its restricted size. This latter aspect can lead to a type II error or false negative, which infers, incorrectly, that it is not possible to conclude that there are significant differences. On the other hand, although communication executives are aware of the reality of the company and its internal communication, the results could be influenced by social desirability biases. In other words, the respondents might have adjusted their statements to what is considered valuable in the field of communication, even more so if they perceive that their work may be being judged.

Bibliographical references

- ARAUJO, M. and MIRANDA, S. (2021). "Multidisciplinarity in internal communication and the challenges ahead". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 26 (1), 107-123.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/CCIJ-01-2020-0012>>
- BERCERUELO, B. (coord.) (2014). *Nueva comunicación interna en la empresa*. Madrid: Estudio de Comunicación/Biblioteca Aedipe de RRHH.
- CHON, M-G., TAM, L. and KIM, J.-N. (2021). "Effects of organisational conflict history and employees' situational perceptions of COVID-19 on negative megaphoning and turnover intention". *Journal of Communication Management*, 25 (3), 298-315.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-10-2020-0114>>
- CORNELISSEN, J. (2020). *Corporate communication. A Guide to Theory and Practice*. 6th ed. London: SAGE.
- COUPER, M. P. (2000). *Web surveys: The questionnaire Design Challenge*. [Date consulted: 22/02/2022] Retrieved from <<https://2001.isiproceedings.org/pdf/263.PDF>>.
- DIRCOM (2018). *Estado de la comunicación en España 2018*. [Date consulted: 22/02/2022] Retrieved from <<http://www.dircom.org/2018/07/13/estado-de-la-comunicacion-en-espana-2018/>>.
- ECKLEBE, S. and LÖFFLER, N. (2021). "A question of quality: perceptions of internal communication during the Covid-19 pandemic in Germany". *Journal of Communication Management*, 25 (3), 214-232.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-09-2020-0101>>
- FÁBREGAS, J., TEJEDOR, S. and SALLA, J. (2021). "La gamificación como recurso telemático en la comunicación empresarial en tiempo de pandemia". *Comunicación*, 44, 57-75.
<<https://doi.org/10.18566/comunica.n44.a04>>
- HEIDE, M. and SIMONSSON, C. (2011). "Putting coworkers in the limelight: New challenges for communication professionals". *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 5 (4), 201-220.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2011.605777>>
- LI, J.-Y., SUN, R., TAO, W. and LEE, Y. (2021). "Employee coping with organisational change in the face of a pandemic: The role of transparent internal communication". *Public Relations Review*, 47 (1), 101984.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101984>>
- MEN, L. R., QIN, Y. S. and JIN, J. (2021). "Fostering Employee Trust via Effective Supervisory Communication during the COVID-19 Pandemic: Through the Lens of Motivating Language Theory". *International Journal of Business Communication*, 59 (2), 193-218.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1177/23294884211020491>>
- MIQUEL-SEGARRA, S. and ACED-TOLEDANO, C. (2019). "El perfil de los responsables de comunicación interna en España". *RAEIC, Revista de la Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación*, 6 (11), 99-118.
<<https://doi.org/10.24137/raic.6.11.7>>
- MISHRA, K., BOYNTON, L. and MISHRA, A. (2014). "Driving Employee Engagement: The Expanded Role of Internal Communications". *International Journal of Business Communication*, 51 (2), 183-202.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/2329488414525399>>

- NEILL, M. S. and BOWEN, S. A. (2021). "Ethical listening to employees during a pandemic: new approaches, barriers and lessons". *Journal of Communication Management*, 27 (3), 276-297.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-09-2020-0103>>
- NELLI, R. P. (2018). *Internal communication in Europe. Key success factors and managerial approaches*. ASCAI & FEIEA (European Association for Internal Communication): Milan: vita e Pensiero. [Date consulted: 0/02/2022] Retrieved from <http://www.ascai.it/uploads/files/RAPPORTI%20ASCAI/E_BOOK%20IC%20EUROPEAN%20REPORT%202018.pdf>.
- RUCK, K. (2020). "Internal communication and the associations with organisational purpose, culture and strategy". In: K. RUCK (ed.). *Exploring Internal Communication, Towards Informed Employee Voice*. 4th ed. Abingdon: Routledge, 2-14.
- RUCK, K. and WELCH, M. (2012). "Valuing internal communication; management and employee perspectives". *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2), 294-302.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.12.016>>
- SINČIĆ-ČORIĆ, D., POLOŠKI-VOKIĆ, N. and TKALAC-VERČIČ, A. (2020). "Does good internal communication enhance life satisfaction?". *Journal of Communication Management*, 24 (4), 363-376.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/JCOM-11-2019-0146>>
- SUN, R., LI, J.-Y., LEE, Y. and TAO, W. (2021). "The Role of Symmetrical Internal Communication in Improving Employee Experiences and Organisational Identification During COVID-19 Pandemic-Induced Organisational Change". *International Journal of Business Communication*.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/23294884211050628>>
- TEJEDOR, S., CERVI, L., TUSA, F., PORTALES, M. and ZABOTINA, M. (2020). "Information on the COVID-19 Pandemic in Daily Newspapers' Front Pages: Case Study of Spain and Italy". *International Journal Environmental Research Public Health*, 17 (17), 6330.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17176330>>
- WELCH, M. (2015). "The Evolution of the Employee Engagement Concept: Communication Implications". In: R. L. HEATH and A. GREGORY (ed.). *Strategic communication*. Los Angeles: SAGE, 201-220.
<<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781473915497>>
- WELCH, M. and JACKSON, P. R. (2007). "Rethinking internal communication: a stakeholder approach". *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 12 (2), 177-198.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563280710744847>>
- XIFRA, J. (2020). "Corporate communication, public relations and reputational risk management in the days of Covid-19". *El profesional de la información*, 29 (2), e290220.
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.mar.20>>
- YEOMANS, L. and FITZPATRICK, L. (2017). "Internal communication". In: R. TENCH and L. YEOMANS (coord.). *Exploring Public Relations. Global Strategic Communication*. 4th ed. Harlow (England): Pearson, 286-307.
- ZERFASS, A., VERHOEVEN, P., TENCH, R., MORENO, A. and VERČIČ, D. (2011). *European Communication Monitor 2011: empirical insights into strategic communication in Europe: results of an empirical survey in 43 countries* (chart version) Brussels: EACD / EUPRERA. [Date consulted: 24/02/2022] Retrieved from <<https://hdl.handle.net/11245/1.356760>>.

- ZERFASS, A., TENCH, R., VERHOEVEN, P., VERČIČ, D. and MORENO, A. (2014). *European Communication Monitor. Excellence in strategic communication, key issues, leadership, gender and mobile media. Results of a survey in 42 countries*. Brussels: EACD/ EUPRERA, Communication Director Magazine. [Date consulted: 24/02/2022] Retrieved from <https://www.researchgate.net/publication/263818012_European_Communication_Monitor_2014_Excellence_in_Strategic_Communication_-_Key_Issues_Leadership_Gender_and_Mobile_Media_Results_of_a_Survey_in_42_Countries>.

Historical evolution of public relations psychology in Europe and the United States

Rocío Torres-Mancera

Universidad de Málaga

rociotorres@uma.es



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: December 2022

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: TORRES-MANCERA, R. (2022). "Historical evolution of public relations psychology in Europe and the United States". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 45-64. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3556>>

Abstract

The study provides a chronological review of public relations (PR) analysed from the perspective of psychology, highlighting milestones, concepts, theories and models. It offers a synthesis of its origins in Europe and how it was imported to the United States, where it was strongly implemented at the academic, political and business levels. The foundations of the emergence and development of PR have psychology as a fundamental pillar (Bernays, 1928) in understanding the propagandistic effects on people's social behaviour. Therefore, it seems that it would be practically impossible to understand and apply this construct throughout history without this joint interdisciplinary work, both in explaining individual and collective response and in diachronically changing behaviour in organizations (Grunig, 1976). An in-depth exploration is carried out of the international manuscripts published to date which highlight the interactions of PR with psychology in terms of public behaviour, leadership and behaviour within organizations. The results bring to light an international perspective of basic contributions and some historic gaps along the way. The identification of several key events from the past helps to understand better the general conceptual framework that connects PR and psychology. The research reveals that there is still a gap regarding the existence of a general theory to explain the history of PR psychology. Nevertheless, from a PR perspective, its psychological influence on the behaviours of the population and the persuasion of stakeholders seems indisputable.

Keywords: stakeholder; influence; persuasion; history; power

Resum. *Evolució històrica de la psicologia de les relacions públiques a Europa i Estats Units*

En aquest estudi es fa una revisió cronològica de les relacions públiques (RP) analitzada des del prisma de la psicologia i posant en relleu fites, conceptes, teories i models. S'hi ofereix una síntesi dels seus orígens a Europa i de com es van importar als Estats Units, on es van implementar amb força en els àmbits acadèmic, polític i empresarial. Les bases de l'aparició i desenvolupament de les RP compten amb la psicologia com a pilar fonamental (Bernays, 1928) a l'hora d'entendre els efectes propagandístics en la conducta social de les persones. Per tant, sembla que resultaria pràcticament impossible entendre i aplicar aquest constructe al llarg de la història sense aquesta labor conjunta interdisciplinària, tant a l'hora d'explicar la resposta individual i col·lectiva, com a l'hora de canviar diacrònicament el comportament de les organitzacions (Grunig, 1976). Es realitza una exploració en profunditat dels manuscrits internacionals publicats fins avui que posin de manifest les interaccions de les RP amb la psicologia en termes de comportament del públic, lideratge i conducta dins de les organitzacions. Els resultats treuen a la llum una perspectiva internacional d'aportacions bàsiques i algunes llacunes històriques en el camí. La identificació de diversos esdeveniments clau del passat ajuda a comprendre millor el marc conceptual general que connecta les relacions públiques i la psicologia. La recerca revela que encara existeix un buit quant a l'existència d'una teoria general que expliqui la història de la psicologia de les RP. No obstant això, des de la perspectiva de les RP sembla indiscutible la importància i la influència psicològica en la gestió dels comportaments de la població general, així com la persuasió i la comunicació amb els grups d'interès.

Paraules clau: grups d'interès; influència; persuasió; història; poder

Resumen. *Evolución histórica de la psicología de las relaciones públicas en Europa y Estados Unidos*

En este estudio se realiza una revisión cronológica de las relaciones públicas (RR. PP.) analizada desde el prisma de la psicología y poniendo de relieve hitos, conceptos, teorías y modelos. Se ofrece una síntesis de sus orígenes en Europa y de cómo se importaron a Estados Unidos, donde se implementaron con fuerza en los ámbitos académico, político y empresarial. Las bases de la aparición y desarrollo de las RR. PP. cuentan con la psicología como pilar fundamental (Bernays, 1928) a la hora de entender los efectos propagandísticos en la conducta social de las personas. Por tanto, parece que resultaría prácticamente imposible entender y aplicar dicho constructo a lo largo de la historia sin esta labor conjunta interdisciplinaria, tanto a la hora de explicar la respuesta individual y colectiva, como a la hora de cambiar diacrónicamente el comportamiento de las organizaciones (Grunig, 1976). Se realiza una exploración en profundidad de los manuscritos internacionales publicados hasta la fecha que pongan de manifiesto las interacciones de las RR. PP. con la psicología en términos de comportamiento del público, liderazgo y conducta dentro de las organizaciones. Los resultados sacan a la luz una perspectiva internacional de aportaciones básicas y algunas lagunas históricas en el camino. La identificación de varios acontecimientos clave del pasado ayuda a comprender mejor el marco conceptual general que conecta las relaciones públicas y la psicología. La investigación revela que todavía existe un vacío en cuanto a la existencia de una teoría general que explique la historia de la psicología de las RR. PP. No obstante, desde la perspectiva de las RR. PP. parece indiscutible la importancia y la influencia psicológica en la gestión de los comportamientos de la población general, así como la persuasión y la comunicación con los grupos de interés.

Palabras clave: grupos de interés; influencia; persuasión; historia; poder

1. Introduction

Difficulties in establishing a unanimous and plausible definition of public relations by academic experts in the field is still an undeniable challenge for researchers. Nevertheless, reviewing the studies directly relating to this matter, it is a fact that psychological factors are mentioned on several occasions. The communication process to create and leverage relationships with different stakeholders involves having extensive knowledge of human behaviour and how to deal with people. To do so, it is essential to work on a clearer conception of the multidisciplinary term “psychology of public relations”.

Within this context, the historical progression of the old Europe and the opportunities movement for expatriated pioneers in the United States may offer important data and reflections on this issue.

2. Objectives

The present research aims to produce a scientific synthesis of the main international texts published throughout history on the concomitances between the discipline of public relations (PR) and the different branches of psychology.

Special attention is paid to momentous events in Europe and the United States. The study aims to identify hidden relevant samples of occurrences that have taken place since the beginning of our era in terms of psychological factors that affect behaviours in organizations. These samples will be classified into a pool of four categories or societal dimensions: 1) education, 2) religion, 3) government policy and 4) entrepreneurship.

This study therefore has two key objectives:

O1: To explore, identify and synthesize previous scientific literature on the psychology of public relations as a multidisciplinary synergic concept.

O2: To identify significant real examples of events throughout history in which organizational strategies were based on PR and psychological methods.

3. Theoretical framework review

3.1. *The conceptualization of public relations*

One of the main errors in defining PR seems to be its own conceptual framework (Nelson, Cutlip and Center, 1959). The discipline has been attacked for the lack of a coherent definition that can explain the real objectives of PR (L'Etang, 2013: 220), probably caused by the lack of intellectual rigor applied and the exacerbated desire to differentiate it from bare propaganda. Castillo and Xifra (2006), in their bibliometric research of doctoral theses, also illustrate a lack of academic documentation by the pioneers of applied PR. Thus, it

seems that the theoretical framework of PR has been developed while interest has been raised from public and private organizations.

Several authors point out that PR is an immature science (Xifra, 2003), without a sufficient empirical body yet, in which the clarification of its own field is one of the main problems to be solved (Grunig, 1989); and this has not been attended to by communication scientists (Pavlik, 1987) in a formal and constant manner.

Notable among the numerous attempts to conceptualize PR is the one given by Grunig (1976), who understands PR as the deliberate and sustained effort to promote mutual understanding between the organization and its publics (Cutlip and Allen, 1971).

More recently, PR has been defined as “the science that deals with the communication processes through which mutually adaptive relationships are established and managed between a publicly relevant person or organization and the publics in its environment” (Xifra, 2003: 9). But what does seem clear, reviewing the studies directly relating to the subject, is that psychological factors are appealed to on numerous occasions in the process of generating these relationships with the different stakeholders. This gives rise to the conception of the multidisciplinary term “psychology of public relations”.

3.2. *Psychology in PR*

Psychology is also considered a relatively new discipline, which emerged in 1880 as an independent derivation of philosophy and physiology (White, 2008). The literature notes informational gaps in creating a general theory of the history of PR, as well as of PR psychology itself, despite the success of studies such as Castillo (2009), Van Ruler and Verčič (2004) and Opdycke and Miller (2009), which focus on a selection of relevant milestones in the history of the pragmatic and feasible evolution of both.

The initial knowledge bases used for PR emerged from the disciplines of psychology and sociology (Bernays, 1928: 958-959), particularly those topics concerning social interaction, cultural attitudes and prejudices transferred intergenerationally. To break this inertia to cultural biases and psychological responsiveness, leaders – social, religious and monarchical – created the phenomenon of public opinion. This *persuasive mission* was interpreted as a new technique originating in the context of psychology with the aim of:

- a) changing people’s opinions, doctrines, beliefs and even habits; and
- b) justifying requested actions appealing to a common purpose for the good of the whole community.

Efforts in explaining these psychological variables in the area of study of PR were made by several authors along the way. Some works especially stand out, such as those by Petty and Cacioppo (1986) regarding the elaboration likelihood model to explain the likelihood process between people. Worchel,

Cooper and Goethals (1988) also exceptionally worked on individual and collective psychological variables in organisational relationships. Ethical theory and the problem of the definition of PR revealed by Pearson (1990) also highlight the individual reconciliation of interests as a key driver.

Nevertheless, there are numerous fragments that focus on synergies between the art of connecting to targeted audiences and pragmatic concepts derived mainly from cognitive-behavioural psychology (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1947; Hovland, Janis and Kelley 1953; Janis, Feshbach and Hunt, 1953; Carroll, 1989; Ferguson, Weigold and Gibbs, 1984; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; L'Etang, 2009; Worchel et al., 1988; Pearson, 1990; Clarkson, 1995; Kelly, 1995; Broom, Casey and Ritchey, 1997; Chen and Chaiken, 1999; Xifra, 2003; Cialdini, 2007; Crilly, Schneider and Zollo, 2008; Berjillos et al., 2009; L'Etang, 2009; Petty and Briñol, 2014).

Social and organizational psychology seem to nurture PR as well (Bernays, 1928; Allport, 1935; Cutlip and Center, 1952; Etzioni, 1964; Cutlip and Allen, 1971; Wilson, 1975; Grunig, 1976; Bell and Bell, 1976; Carroll, 1989; Ferguson et al., 1984; Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Worchel et al., 1988; Grunig and Repper, 1992; Leakey and Lewin, 1994; Donaldson and Preston, 1995; Broom et al., 1997; Cancel et al., 1997; Mitchell, Agle and Wood, 1997; Luhmann, 1998; Chen and Chaiken, 1999; Hon and Grunig, 1999; Hallahan, 2000; Kochan and Rubinstein, 2000; Grunig and Hunt, 2003; Ledingham, 2003; Xifra, 2003; Esteno et al., 2004; Berger and Reber, 2005; Castillo and Xifra, 2006; Rawlins, 2006; White, 2008; Capriotti, 2013; Ruiz-Mora, Lugo-Ocando and Castillo-Esparcia, 2016; De Las Heras-Pedrosa, Ruiz-Mora and Paniagua, 2018; Torres-Mancera, 2021).

Over the years, an interesting holistic and systemic perspective of PR (Allport and Newcomb, 1954; Miller and Sanford, 1955; Bell and Bell, 1976; Katz and Kahn, 1978) was also developed. From this perspective, external (Bernays, 1928; Luhmann, 1998; L'Etang, 2009) and internal (Almansa, 2003; De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2018) communicative strategies affect stakeholders' attitudes towards organisations.

3.3. Cognitive-behavioural psychology applied to PR

The study of people's behaviour has been a priority for PR since time immemorial, taking on an explicit role in timeless constructs such as Bernays' theory of propaganda and PR (1928). This interdisciplinary symbiosis between psychology and PR has helped both to understand individual and group responses and to improve the interaction between emitter and receiver, with the aim of informing, persuading or changing people's behaviour towards others (Grunig, 1976). This knowledge means that leaders could have certain power to bring very diverse opinions closer or to confront common attitudes to break alliances.

Among the most relevant theoretical psychological models applied to PR, the literature also emphasizes the *prosocial behaviour model* (Wilson, 1975;

Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989). This concept refers to a set of voluntary actions that are undertaken in order to correspond to an organisation, person or community for ethical reasons. Unlike altruism, in which no return of any kind is expected, such behaviour would consist of a particular action (Drezner and Huehls, 2015) that would illustrate the personal circumstances by which people choose whether to respond to a particular call.

But beyond the constructive interdisciplinary aspect, messages based on *fear and manipulation* (Janis et al., 1953) are also tools studied and available to the powerful to coerce behaviour. From this position forced by the intensity of the surrounding context and appealing to anxiety and possible aggression, the person values giving in to gain approval, power or simply to avoid danger. To help understand how to work on behaviours from a PR perspective, primary and secondary individual roles depending on attitude and interaction were identified by Clarkson (1995). In the same year, Donaldson and Preston (1995) studied instrumental and normative relationships from the behavioural angle.

Psychological barriers in communication and PR (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1947) are too important to be missed. To better understand its mechanism, Cutlip and Center (1952) focused on PR as a two-way process model that facilitates the flow of communication for mutual interests and understanding.

Almost the same year, Janis et al. (1953) studied persuasion through fear and manipulation. Other outstanding research to highlight includes: the study focusing on the emotional conditioning of feeling indebted, conducted by Leakey and Lewin (1994); the PR theoretical model based on three phases, namely relationship antecedents, the interaction process and the behavioural outcome of the contact (Broom et al., 1997); the “five audiences model” according to the degree of knowledge and involvement (Hallahan, 2000); and the behavioural prediction of attitudinal rapprochement or disengagement model (Petty and Briñol, 2014).

3.4. Social and organizational psychology in the professional PR environment

Social psychology contributes many recurring ideas in the theoretical and practical applications of PR, such as attitude and decision-making (Allport, 1935), the dynamics of expectations (Esteno et al., 2004) between organizations and people’s behaviour (Carroll, 1989), participation in projects through the connection with individual values and feelings (Crilly et al., 2008), involvement, meaning and reputation.

This branch of psychology works especially on the variables that affect or prevent conflicts in organizations (Worchel et al., 1988) due to: a) individual idiosyncrasies; b) the influence of organizations on people; c) dynamics and processes that affect relationships with stakeholders; d) the construction of leadership for management; e) negotiation skills; f) persuasion; and e) attitude towards change. Thus, it is no coincidence that PR studies seek strategic

elements (Hon and Grunig, 1999) based on the psychological perceptions, attitudes and behavioural responses of stakeholders (Berjillos et al., 2009) and targeted audiences.

Factors that affect people's performance, such as motivation, contextual idiosyncrasies, prejudices, socioeconomic conditions and other inherent intergenerational cultural beliefs (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1947; Worchel et al., 1988), are potentially strategic predictive indicators for PR work (Xifra, 2003) to understand and persuade people.

Aligned to this, professional PR pursues the research and development of predictive inferential models (Xifra, 2003) of the true deep motivations (Hyman and Sheatsley, 1947) of stakeholders. To this purpose, tools from applied social psychology are very revealing (Bernays, 1928; Allport, 1935; Castillo and Xifra, 2006).

Regarding the evolution of research into PR focused on social psychology, certain key authors have produced significant milestones. Allport (1935) identified elements of social psychology in PR facts that influence attitude and decision-making. Wilson (1975) analysed the correlation between PR and pro-social behaviour. Grunig (1976) settled on a situational approach to explain persuasion in PR, and a few years later together with Repper revealed the "theory of excellence in PR and communication management" (Grunig and Repper, 1992) to explain several facts that affect organizational ecosystems (Ferguson et al., 1984). Persuasion of stakeholders is essential for any organization that wishes to increase its funding (Kelly, 1995), and to this goal multicausal variables in the persuasive process are involved (Chen and Chaiken, 1999). Special efforts to measure the quality of PR interactions based on psychological profiles were made by Hon and Grunig (1999).

Psychology has also contributed knowledge and practices of great interest to PR in stakeholder communication and management (Mitchell et al., 1997; Kochan and Rubinstein, 2000; Ledingham, 2003; Castillo and Xifra, 2006; Ruiz-Mora et al., 2016). For instance, Etzioni (1964) worked on possible types of behaviour within organisations, while Cutlip and Allen (1971) focused on understanding the relationships between the organisation and its audiences. These dynamics of organisational-personal behaviours (Carroll, 1989) create expectations between parts.

3.5. Systemic psychology applied to PR persuasion

Persuasion is another element that has been present throughout the history of PR and psychology. From the perspective of a psychology of memory, the recording of lived experience stored as memory is seen as a key factor in the elaboration of persuasive arguments (Hovland et al., 1953; Petty, Wegener and Fabrigar, 1997) that facilitate the prediction of behaviour.

Bell and Bell (1976) created a "general systems theory applied to PR", and Luhmann (1998) reinforced the study with his "systemic theory applied to PR". Other authors, including Grunig and Hunt (2003) and Rawlins (2006),

argue for the importance of a systematic and comprehensive linkage management model to deal with publics.

Since these interactions affect the whole systemic network involving the individual and the organisation, the PR contingency theory (Cancel et al., 1997) can add value to understand all facts involved in the *persuasion process*. The multi-causal variables that influence (Capriotti, 2013) the persuasive path until a particular outcome is reached are considered in an interesting heuristic-systematic model developed by Chen and Chaiken (1999). But prior to this archetype, the likelihood model (Petty and Cacioppo, 1986; Petty and Wegener, 1999) established an outstanding milestone to understand the persuasion process. To help understand it, the model considers internal and external variables that directly affect final behaviour, and establishes as key indicators factors such as the receiver's previous experience and state of mind at that moment, their degree of attention and active listening, the structure, form and content of the message, the basis of narrative discourse, the context of the interaction, possible noises, and elements that facilitate concentration.

Petty and Briñol (2014) also present a theoretical model as a predictive behavioural instrument of collaborative attitudinal approach or withdrawal. Thus, depending on the format and content of the message and the emotion it seeks to create or appeal to, empathy, change of mind or rejection is generated depending on the freedom of thought perceived by the person or entity targeted by the message.

The connection between persuasion and emotion seems to occur because of a systemic sequence of induced expectations (Esteno et al., 2004) that is susceptible to the intention of specific persuasive actions, the emotional ecosystem, and the response. Thus, when the emotional tone of the message is matched to the receiver's state of mind, the persuasiveness of the transmitter increases considerably and facilitates participation in line with the expectations set out in the target arguments of the message.

In 2007, Cialdini explicitly speaks of a *psychology of persuasion* based on a "rule of reciprocity and a sense of obligation pervasive in the culture of society" (Torres-Mancera, 2021) that generates an emotional effect of feeling indebted (Leakey and Lewin, 1994). This anthropological gesture is an ancestral adaptive mechanism in the interdependent behavioural axis of giving-receiving-thanking, and also explains the origin of the exchange of goods or services between entities and systems made up by people.

Other models such as the *systemic* or heuristic one developed by Chen and Chaiken (1999) highlight the importance of the interactions and roles between people when it comes to structuring appropriate strategic communication. In this process, variables such as the coherence of the signals, the time of exposure and the degree of related elements play a decisive role. Another, the attributes and prominence model (Mitchell et al., 1997), identifies and classifies *stakeholders* according to the level of power exercised or desired, the relevance of interests and the urgency of the objective. *Influence and power*

(Berger and Reber, 2005; L'Étang, 2009; Capriotti, 2013) in organizations are also based on the behaviour of individuals within them, which could be classified into three typologies (Etzioni, 1964): a) physical or coercive; b) utilitarian or economic; and c) normative and symbolic. Other authors speak of the degree of social and behavioural influence (Clarkson, 1995) based on the parameters of reactivity/proactivity and defence/complacency.

4. Methodology

The methodological architecture is built up under the format of direct participant observation. A matrix is designed to collect and interpret data from documents located in one of the largest university repositories in the world: the University of Oxford and its Bodleian Library¹.

From the universe of documents available on its Search Oxford Libraries Online (SOLO) digital platform, scientific references on theories, paradigms and strategies of a psychological nature applied to PR are explored. With this purpose, in-situ research is held.

Data collection and analysis follows a preliminary content analysis. A keyword search was carried out for all SOLO publications included under the filter “psychology and public relations”. Most relevant works were then selected because of their relevant contributions. Lastly, a final criterion to prioritize key outputs of each period was primarily based on the historical studies of Van Ruler and Verčič (2004), Opdycke and Miller (2009), and Castillo (2009).

5. Results

5.1. Historical milestones in psychology and PR on the Europe-US axis

A synthetic and chronological review is compiled of symbolic milestones of tactical objectives in PR matters, psychological premises, the geographical focus of the actions and the entities involved. Four key dimensions are recorded to broadly understand the development of society through the prism of PR psychology and its practical tools: religion, education, government policies and the commercial sector. For this purpose, the historical studies of Van Ruler and Verčič (2004), as well as Opdycke and Miller (2009) and Castillo (2009) are used as references.

Table 1 shows in chronological order key actions carried out by religion throughout history, particularly the Catholic and Anglican religions, with the aim of gaining followers and exerting influence on their communities.

1. The Bodleian Library contains a legal depository stretching back 400 years, with more than 12 million printed articles, over 80,000 electronic journals and special collections that include books and manuscripts, papyri, maps and other printed material.

Table 1. Historical overview of the first PR tactics based on psychological tools in the religion sector

Period	Religious tactics	Individual/Organisation	Origin
1st century	Audience segmentation and personalised visits	St Paul	Antioch, Turkey
10th century	Meeting and event generation, donor research	Aethelwold, Bishop of Winchester	South UK
9th-20th century	Cognitive behavioural persuasion through literature	Catholic Church/Spain	Spain, Compostela etc.
11th-13th centuries	Persuasion via propaganda and pseudo-events	Slovenian bishops and crusades	Slovenia and Europe
11th-16th centuries	Written word and sermons for cognitive behavioural change	Dunstan/Glastonbury Abbey	South UK
16th century	Press and art as tools of suggestion	Catholic Church	Italy
		Pope Clement VIII	Europe
		Council of Trent	
		Pope Pius IV	
17th century	Press office, persuasion via reputation, brochures and pamphlets	Cardenal Richelieu	France
		Pope Gregory XV	Italy
			Europe
18th century	Press releases, transatlantic letter network, indoctrinating sermons	Benjamin Colman/Isaac Watts/John Guyse	North America
	Aristotelian persuasion "pathos over logos" (emotion over reason)	George Whitefield/William Seward	Europe
19th century	Seduction with newspaper advertisements, handbills and posters	Charles Finney	Europe and North America
		Dwight Moody	
20th century	Humanistic psychology and transcendence	Maslow	North America
Early 21st century	Crisis of values and erosion of Catholicism, alternative spirituality	Open platforms	Global

Source: own elaboration.

The historical development of the education sector, especially the university sector, through key actions in PR supported by the perspective of psychology (see Table 2) aims to raise awareness of, defend and safeguard human rights, values and knowledge.

Table 2. Historical overview of the first PR tactics based on psychological tools in the education sector

Period	Educative tactics	Individual/Organisation	Origin
17th century	Searching for and securing the loyalty of intergenerational donors	Harvard University	United Kingdom North America
18th century	Appeal for cooperation through letters of request, symbolic objects (baskets, chests)	Benjamin Franklin King's College, New York (Columbia University)	North America
End of the 18th century	Cognitive behavioural change by means of brochures, relationship by means of subscription lists	Top American Universities	North America
Early 19th century	Social interventions through dances, conferences, press relations, actions and non-profit funds	American towns for Lafayette, Women's Moral Reform Society, Women's Moral Reform Society	North America and Central Europe
Middle of the 19th century	Emotional appeals, legal petitions, food and drink drives, conventions, long-term relationships built on logos/logo signs	Irish Famine Relief, temperance movement, women's rights, reform movements, "A Just Boston", support for abolition of Wendell Phillips	North America and Central Europe
Late 19th and 20th century	Speech training to influence public opinion, how to inform, supporter visits, two months' advance press notice, white/blue ribbons as a symbol of support and empathy, publications to indoctrinate children, alcohol law magazines and manuals for behaviour control, internal communication, conferences, alumni relations, persuasion through lobbying	Knights of the Templar Order, Fisk University, American Red Cross, University of Edinburgh, New York City Hospitals, Great Irish Famine Committee, Women's Suffrage, John Muir for Sierra Club, Jewish Federation, Anti-Saloon League of America	United States and Europe
21st century	Isolation and digital connectivity COVID-19	Pandemic, technology and digitalisation	Worldwide

Source: own elaboration.

Since ancient political and governmental times, PR strategies have aimed to persuade, disseminate information, appropriate territories, gain independence from oppressive regimes and increase power (see Table 3).

Table 3. Historical overview of the first PR tactics based on psychological tools in the political and governmental sector

Period	Political and governmental tactics	Individual/Organisation	Origin
B.C.	Social relations through messaging	Themistocles	Greece
	Press unit for persuasion	Alexander the Great	Macedonia
		Hannibal	Carthage
10th century	Information and influence through pamphlets and speeches. "Preserve power, impose or increase famine"	Öffentlichkeitsarbeit, predecessor of the US government and PR policy	Austria
9th-20th centuries	Ceremonies and pilgrimage of military units as messages of power	Catholic Church	Spain
11th-13th centuries	Incitement to development through "advanced man"	Gengis Khan	Mongolia, Chinese Empire and Europe
End of the 15th century	Promotional diaries	Emperor Maximilian	Austria
16th century	Cognitive behavioural reinforcement through imposition of medals, symbolic acts and architecture. Subjugation through propaganda of atrocities	Elizabeth I of England	United Kingdom
		Robert the Pious (Rudolf III)	France
17th century	Newspapers, theatre, music, paintings and publications translated and sent abroad.	The Sun King (Louis XIV of France)	France
18th century	Books, broadcasts, political cartoons	Benjamin Franklin	America
Middle 18th century	Behaviours and correspondences between colonies, rotating societies	"Sons of Liberty" and Boston Tea Party. "Daughters of Liberty" against the Stamp Act	North America
	Relationship-building, grassroots communities, centralised communication, collection of evidence, posters	Samuel Adams, Continental Congress for American Independence from the United Kingdom	United Kingdom
19th century	Attitudinal uplift through manifestos, target audience messaging, biography-based campaigns, distribution of speeches, recruitment of campaign leaders, anonymous writings	Napoleon, Andrew Jackson and Amos Kendall, Nicholas Biddle's (anti-Jackson) publicists, Abraham Lincoln	France, North America

Early 19th century	Interaction and information via telegraph, filtered public opinion in the press, interviews with presidents for proximity	Prussia President Zachary Taylor	North America
	Social responsibility, patronage, PR and industrialisation	Thomas Jefferson, Ivy Lee	
End of 19th century	Influence of the masses via political rallies, press office of the foreign ministry	Otto von Bismarck	Prussia
	Paid persuasion to foreign press, daily summaries	Prussian Government	Germany
	“Publicity and promotion” departments for interest groups	President Rutherford B. Hayes	North America
	Information outreach with naval press office, and road shows and exhibitions	Admiral Alfred von Tirpitz	
		Gifford Pinchot	
20th century	Public Information Committee: mass dissemination	President Woodrow Wilson Prime minister Harold Wilson	North America United Kingdom
	Social Psychology applied to PR	Bernays, George Creel	
	PR for social needs	World Wars of States	
	Depersonalisation of the individual to create wars		
	Fire-side chats bringing politics closer to the citizen	Franklin D. Roosevelt	
Early 21st century	Beginning of the golden age of psychology and neuroscience applied to PR through the media and networks	Pandemic, technology and digitalisation	Worldwide

Source: own elaboration.

Table 4. Historical overview of early PR tactics based on psychological tools in the business sector.

Period	Business tactics	Individual/Organisation	Origin
B.C.	Cognitive attention advertising (graffiti)	Small businesses	Pompeii, Italy
17th century	Persuasion through pamphlets	London Company of Virginia	Europe North America
	Attracting co-operators at events	Businesses linked to the colonies	
	Planned events		
	Trust through clerical endorsement		
18th century	Stakeholder meetings	General James Oglethorpe	Central Europe and Georgia
19th century	Editorial press releases of exhibitions	Volunteering	Europe
	Influence through bribes to the press	P.T. Barnum and scandals	North America
	Creativity and design	Cotton mills	
	Search for women's working role		
	Personal testimonial promotional biography		
	Anonymity - person writing under pseudonyms		
	Cognitive attention outdoor illuminated advertising		
Mid 19th century	Influence on press by bribery	Railroads in the U.S.	North America
	Cognitive behavioural targeting of speeches and stories	P. T. Barnum American Museum	Canada
	Philanthropic relationships with universities	American Medical Association, Medical Practitioners	
	"Logos over pathos" messages: reason over emotion	Travellers' insurance companies	
	Social stratification middle class messages		
	Appeal to Christian ethical values		
	Persuasion by lobbying		
	Entity-employee interaction: Internal magazines		

End of the 19th century	Social interaction via industry spokesman	Wanamaker's and Macy's	Europe and North America
	Proximity daily contact editorials published daily	Life Insurance Agents	
	Cognitive interaction with corporate magazines (internal and external)	Westinghouse Electric Company	
	"Publicity and promotion" departments for interest groups	Chicago World's Fair	
	Workplace abuse and muck-rakers		
	Behavioural persuasion integrated marketing	Thomas Lipton	
20th century	Resilience to crises and wars, revolution and democratisation of information	John Rockefeller Jr.	Europe
	Organisational globalisation, sense of cultural belonging. "Americanisation" of European behaviours	Economic crises and world wars	
	Working conditions and human rights	Employers	
Early 21st century	Beginning of the golden age of psychology and neuroscience applied to PR	Pandemic, technology and digitalisation	Worldwide
	Isolation and digital PR, COVID-19		

Source: own elaboration.

Regarding the business sector (see Table 4), the tactics used to connect with customers were mainly based on social psychology and cognitive-behavioural psychology. From these perspectives, marketing and corporate communications aimed to cultivate PR with external publics. By the end of the 19th century there is growing awareness about practicing PR within companies, appealing to an organizational psychology.

6. Discussion and conclusions

This study provides a new, conscious vision of the convergences of PR and psychology, moving from a theoretical and conceptual perspective to the praxis exemplified in real cases that have occurred in the origins and strategic-geographical growth of the world powers of Europe and North America. In line with the opening theoretical assumption that the discipline of PR has some gaps in its conceptual framework still to be filled (Nelson et al., 1959; L'Etang, 2009), the literature review undertaken for this study also reveals significant gaps in the information needed to construct a general theory of

PR psychology. Nevertheless, many psychological model-based approaches that have been used throughout history are noted in the analysis.

Cognitive-behavioural, social and organizational tactical actions are identified in the results matrices (see Tables 1-4), in alignment with the review of theoretical topics. Psychological perspectives, variables and techniques that work on idiosyncrasies, motivations, influences, trust and persuasion to achieve objectives through PR strategies are found throughout the results. Messages and tactics appeal to individual and community empathy and cooperation, through purposely-prepared documents and loyalty reward systems.

Without judging the successes or failures of the four levels analysed (government, church, academia and private enterprise), the behaviour of communities is significantly affected by the decision-making of power actors. This is sometimes achieved by fear and manipulation (Janis et al., 1953) as occurs in the processes of depersonalization required for individuals to go to war without valuing their lives; at other times it is achieved by the ambition of the species, as in the case of the massive migratory phenomena towards the United States since the 18th century.

It is not surprising, therefore, that social, religious and monarchical leaders created the phenomenon of public opinion to persuade others in a cognitive-behavioural manner (Bernays, 1928). Thus, cognitive routes with an achievement orientation and the need for community approval (Wilson, 1975; Carroll, 1989; Eisenberg and Mussen, 1989) may elicit positive behaviours of empathy and collaboration or negative behaviours of aggression, guilt, anxiety or lack of remorse (i.e. in military campaigns).

Psychosocial factors also seem to be involved in individual decision-making. This is explained by the perceived personal benefit and opportunity cost of the relational behaviour selected by the individual versus the other options of non-applied behavioural registers (Etzioni, 1964; Clarkson, 1995). For example, when adopting ideologies, fashions or new life and consumption habits, it becomes easier when some people in the community are already doing so with perceived benefits (gaining status or rewards). Accordingly, the bidirectional (Cutlip and Center, 1952; De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2018), contingent (Cancel et al., 1997) and systemic (Bell and Bell, 1976; Luhmann 1998) influence between the objectives of different sources of power, the psychological tools for PR empowerment and the impact of their achievements in the axis of Europe and the United States are corroborated by the analysis data.

Finally, looking at all analysed statements (religion, education, government and business) in the current research, a clear evolution of psychology can be seen in recent centuries, and it has become a bigger tactic used to connect organizations with people. Thinking about current organizational skills, this differential and demanded human touch approach can be the definitive boost to the discipline of PR psychology. Now that most of its effects can really be measured and validated with the support of neuroscience techniques, the real golden era of applied psychology for all stakeholders has begun.

However, to generate a more global vision, further complementary research is proposed to extrapolate the model applied to the study of the reality of PR psychology in other perhaps less hypnotic but equally relevant ecosystems, such as the geographical areas of Asia, and Central and South America, or latest generation sectors such as (re)industrialization, the circular economy, artificial intelligence, neuroscience, and the parallel digital world or metaverse. Therefore, the potential benefits and dangers of PR influences on people's psyche in this new hyper-connected world become the biggest challenge ever.

Bibliographical references

- ALLPORT, G. W. (1935). "Attitudes". In: *A Handbook of Social Psychology*. Worcester, MA, US: Clark University Press, 798-844.
- ALLPORT, F. and NEWCOMB, T. (1954). "The structuring of events: outline of a general theory with applications to psychology". *Psychological Review*, 61 (5), 281-303.
<<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0062678>>
- ALMANSA, A. (2003). *Teoría, estructura y funcionamiento de los gabinetes de comunicación*. Málaga: Universidad de Málaga.
- BELL, S. and BELL, E. (1976). "Public relations: Functional or functionary?". *Public Relations Review*, 2 (2), 47-57.
<[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(76\)80004-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(76)80004-5)>
- BERGER, B. K. and REBER, B. H. (2005). *Gaining influence in public relations: The role of resistance in practice*. New York: Routledge.
- BERNAYS, E. (1928). "Manipulating Public Opinion: The Why and The How". *American Journal of Sociology*, 33 (6), 958-971.
<<https://doi.org/10.1086/214599>>
- BROOM, G. M., CASEY, S. and RITCHEY, J. (1997). "Toward a concept and theory of organization-public relationships". *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9 (2), 83-98.
<https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr0902_01>
- BERJILLOS, A., JIMÉNEZ, M. T., VALENCIA, P. T. and PERALBO, A. C. (2009). "Stakeholders, intangibles y generación de valor en las empresas del IBEX-35: Una estimación mediante modelos de panel". *Spanish Journal of Finance and Accounting / Revista Española de Financiación y Contabilidad*, 38 (142), 239-263.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/02102412.2009.10779668>>
- CANCEL, A., CAMERON, G., SALLOT, L. and MITROOK, M. (1997). "It Depends: A Contingency Theory of Accommodation in Public Relations". *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 9 (1), 31-63.
<https://doi.org/10.1207/s1532754xjpr0901_02>
- CARROLL, A. B. (1989). *Business and society: Ethics and stakeholder management*. Cincinnati: South-Western.
- CAPRIOTTI, P. (2013). *Planificación estratégica de la imagen corporativa* (4th ed.). Málaga: Instituto de Investigación en Relaciones Públicas.
- CASTILLO, A. (2009). *Relaciones públicas. Teoría e historia*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC.
- CASTILLO, A. and XIFRA TRIADÚ, J. (2006). "Investigación bibliométrica de las tesis doctorales españolas sobre las relaciones públicas". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 34, 141-161.

- CHEN, S. and CHAIKEN, S. (1999). "The heuristic-systematic model in its broader context". In: S. CHAIKEN and Y. TROPE (Eds.). *Dual-process theories in social psychology*. New York: The Guilford Press, 73-96.
- CIALDINI, R. (2007). *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* (EPub edition). New York: Harper Collins.
- CLARKSON, M.B.E. (1995). "A Stakeholder Framework for Analyzing and Evaluating Corporate Social Performance". *Academy of Management Review*, 20 (1), 92-117. <<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9503271994>>
- CRILLY, D., SCHNEIDER, S. C. and ZOLLO, M. (2008). "Psychological antecedents to socially responsible behavior". *European Management Review*, 5, 175-190. <<https://doi.org/10.1057/emr.2008.15>>
- CUTLIP, S. M. and ALLEN, H. C. (1971). *Effective Public Relations* (4th ed). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- CUTLIP, S. M. and CENTER, A. H. (1952). *Effective public relations*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C., RUIZ-MORA, I. and PANIAGUA ROJANO, F. J. (2018). *Gestión de la Comunicación en Instituciones*. Madrid: Pearson.
- DONALDSON, T. and PRESTON, L. E. (1995). "The Stakeholder Theory of the Corporation: Concepts, Evidence, and Implications". *Academy of Management Review*, 20 (1), 65-91. <<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1995.9503271992>>
- DREZNER, N. and HUEHLS, F. (2015). *Fundraising and Institutional Advancement*. New York: Routledge. <<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203123850>>
- EISENBERG, N. and MUSSEN, P. H. (1989). *The roots of prosocial behavior in children*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press.
- ESTENO, D., PETTY, R., RUCKER, D., WEGENER, D., BRAVERMAN, J. and DEVINE, P. (2004). "Discrete Emotions and Persuasion: The Role of Emotion-Induced Expectancies". *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 86 (1), 43-56. <<https://doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.86.1.43>>
- ETZIONI, A. (1964). *Modern organizations*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall.
- FERGUSON, M. A., WEIGOLD M. F. and GIBBS, J. D. (1984). *The Relationship of Public Relations and Board-Level Boundary-Spanning Roles to Corporate Social Responsibility*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Association for Education in Journalism and Mass Communication (67th, Gainesville, FL, August 5-8). Retrieved from <<https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED245268.pdf>> [Consulted on 20 April 2022].
- GRUNIG, J. E. (1976). "Organizations and public relations: Testing a communication theory". *Journalism Monographs*, 46.
- (1989). "Symmetrical presuppositions as a framework for public relations theory". In: C. H. BOTAN and J. HAZLETON (eds.). *Public relations theory*. Hillsdale: Lawrence Erlbaum.
- GRUNIG, J. E. y HUNT, T. (2003). *Dirección de Relaciones Públicas*. Barcelona: Planeta.
- GRUNIG, J. E. and REPPER, F. C. (1992). "Strategic Management, Publics and Issues". In: GRUNIG, J. E. (Ed.). *Excellence in Public Relations and Communication Management*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- HALLAHAN, K. (2000). "Inactive publics: The forgotten publics in public relations". *Public Relations Review*, 26 (4), 499-515. <[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(00\)00061-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(00)00061-8)>

- HYMAN, H. H. and SHEATSLEY, P. B. (1947). "Some Reasons Why Information Campaigns Fail". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 11, 412-423.
- HON, L. C. and GRUNIG, J. E. (1999). *Guidelines for measuring relationships in public relations*. Gainesville: Institute for Public Relations.
- HOVLAND C. I., JANIS I. L., KELLEY H. H. (1953). *Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
- JANIS, I., FESHBACH, S. and HUNT, J. (1953). "Effects of fear-arousing communications". *The Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, 48 (1), 78-92.
<<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0060732>>
- KATZ, D. and KAHN, R. (1978). *The social psychology of organizations* (2nd ed). New York: John Wiley and sons.
- KOCHAN, T. and RUBISTEIN, S. (2000). "Toward a stakeholder theory of the firm: the Saturn Partnership". *Organization Science*, 11 (4), 367-386.
<<https://doi.org/10.1287/ORSC.11.4.367.14601>>
- KELLY, K. S. (1995). Utilizing public relations theory to conceptualize and test models of fundraising. *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 1 (72), 106-127.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/107769909507200109>>
- LEAKEY, R. and LEWIN, R. (1994). *Nuestros orígenes*. Barcelona: RBA.
- L'ÉTANG, J. (2009). "Public Relations and Diplomacy in a Globalized World: An Issue of Public Communication". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53 (4), 607-626.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209347633>>
- (2013). *Public Relations in Britain: A History of Professional Practice in the 20th Century*. London: Routledge.
<<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781410610812>>
- LEDINGHAM, J. (2003). Explicating Relationship Management as a General Theory of Public Relations. *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 15 (2), 181-198.
<https://doi.org/10.1207/S1532754XJPRR1502_4>
- LUHMANN, N. (1998). *Sistemas sociales: lineamientos para una teoría general* (2nd edition). Barcelona: Anthropos.
- MILLER, J. and SANFORD, F. (1955). "Toward a general theory for the behavioral sciences". *American Psychologist*, 10 (9), 513-531.
<<https://doi.org/10.1037/h0045498>>
- MITCHELL, R. K., AGLE, B. R. and WOOD, D. J. (1997). "Toward a Theory of Stakeholder. Identification and Salience: Defining the Principle of who and What Really Counts". *Academy of Management Review*, 22 (4), 853-886.
<<https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.1997.9711022105>>
- NELSON, H., CUTLIP, S. M. and CENTER, A. H. (1959). "Effective Public Relations". *Journal of Marketing*, 23 (4), 473.
<<https://doi.org/10.2307/1247431>>
- OPDYCKE, L. M. and MILLER, R. K. (2009). "Removing the Spin: Toward a New Theory of Public Relations History". *Journalism and Communication Monographs*, 11 (4), 280-362.
- PAVLIK, J.V. (1987). *Public Relations: What Research Tell Us*. London: Sage [translated as *La investigación en relaciones públicas*. Barcelona: Gestión 2000. (1999)].
- PEARSON, R. (1990). "Perspectives on public relations history". *Public Relations Review*, 16 (3), 27-38.
<[https://doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111\(05\)80067-0](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0363-8111(05)80067-0)>

- PETTY, R. and BRIÑOL, P. (2014). Emotion and persuasion: Cognitive and meta-cognitive processes impact attitudes. *Cognition and Emotion*, 29 (1), 1-26.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/02699931.2014.967183>>
- PETTY, R. E. and CACIOPPO, J. T. (1986). "The Elaboration Likelihood Model of Persuasion". In: *Communication and Persuasion*. New York: Springer, 1-24.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4612-4964-1_1>
- PETTY, R. E. and WEGENER, D. T. (1999). "The elaboration likelihood model: Current status and controversies". In: S. CHAIKEN and Y. TROPE (Eds.). *Dual-process theories in social psychology*. New York: The Guilford Press, 37-72.
- PETTY, R. E., WEGENER, D. T. and FABRIGAR, L. R. (1997). "Attitudes and attitude change". *Annual Review of Psychology*, 48 (1), 609-647.
<<https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.48.1.609>>
- RAWLINS, B. L. (2006). *Prioritizing Stakeholders for PR*. Retrieved from <<http://www.scribd.com/doc/4237201/Prioritizing-Stakeholders-for-PR-Brad-LRawlins>> Consulted on 22 April 2022.
- RUIZ-MORA, I., LUGO-OCANDO, J. and CASTILLO-ESPARCIA, A. (2016). "Reluctant to talk, reluctant to listen: Public relations professionals and their involvement in CSR programmes in Spain". *Public Relations Review*, 3 (42), 402-40.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2015.11.008>>
- TORRES-MANCERA, R. (2021). *Relaciones públicas y comunicación para un fundraising sostenible. Perspectivas internacionales* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation] Universidad de Málaga.
- VAN RULER, B. and VERČIČ, D. (2004). *Public Relations and Communication Management in Europe: A Nation-by-Nation Introduction to Public Relations Theory and Practice*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
<<https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110197198>>
- WILSON, E. O. (1975). *Sociobiology: The New Synthesis*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.
- WORCHEL, S., COOPER, J. and GOETHALS, G. R. (1988). *Understanding social psychology* (5th ed). Pacific Grove, Calif: Brooks/Cole Pub. Co.
- WHITE, J. (2008). "Psychology and public relations". In: D. MOSS, D. VERČIČ and G. WARNABY (Eds.). *Perspectives on Public Relations Research*. London: Routledge, 161-172.
- XIFRA, J. (2003). *Teorías y estructura de las relaciones públicas*. Madrid: McGraw Hill-Interamericana de España.

Bibliometric analysis and network mapping of the scientific literature on the influence of public relations on well-being and happiness

Dolores Rando-Cueto
José Manuel Nuñez-Sánchez
Carmen Jambrino-Maldonado
Patricia P. Iglesias-Sánchez
Carlos de las Heras-Pedrosa

Universidad de Málaga
lrandoCueto@uma.es
josemanuel.nunez@uma.es
mcjambrino@uma.es
patricia.iglesias@uma.es
cheras@uma.es



Submission date: June 2022
Accepted date: December 2022
Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: RANDO-CUETO, D., NUÑEZ-SÁNCHEZ, J. M., JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C., IGLESIAS-SÁNCHEZ, P. and DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C. (2022). "Bibliometric analysis and network mapping of the scientific literature on the influence of public relations on well-being and happiness". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 65-86. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3562>>

Abstract

Managing employees' happiness and well-being as a business strategy offers positive outcomes for companies, as has been widely studied in the scientific literature. In the field of public relations, published studies address these benefits for individuals and collectively, both for the employees themselves (Pérez, 2020) and for the organisation for which they work, whether intangible or tangible (Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2020; Sidney et al., 2017). However, the function of promoting a good working environment is not always attended to in the workplace, nor is it always exclusive to a specific area (Bowen, 2008). In addition to a systematic documentary review, the Web of Science database is used for a bibliometric study and network mapping of the scientific literature, from which articles are extracted for analysis using different bibliographic searches. Based on the information obtained, VOSviewer software is used for the analysis of bibliometric networks by authorship, citation and co-occurrence of keywords in scientific publica-

tions. The number of articles published on the management of happiness and wellbeing in organisations as part of their public relations has increased significantly over the last decade, although there has been a notable change in this growth since 2021. According to the research, corporate social responsibility programmes are increasingly considering these aspects as part of their organisational strategy, and departments such as human resources are taking on a greater role in generating a good working environment. This study provides an overview of the international production of scientific publications on the subject of happiness management and organisational well-being from the point of view of public relations. It shows the evolution of scientific activity in terms of the number of works published by area of knowledge and the current trends in terms of authorship, subject matter and repercussion in the scientific field.

Keywords: public relations; happiness; well-being; organizations; bibliometric

Resum. *Anàlisi bibliomètrica i mapatge de xarxes de la literatura científica sobre la influència de les relacions públiques en el benestar i la felicitat*

La gestió de la felicitat i el benestar dels empleats com a estratègia organitzativa ofereix resultats positius per a les empreses, tal com ha estat àmpliament estudiat en la literatura científica. En l'àmbit de les relacions públiques, els estudis publicats aborden aquests beneficis tant individualment com col·lectivament: per als empleats (Pérez, 2020) i per a l'entitat per a la qual treballen, siguin intangibles o tangibles (Castro-Martínez i Díaz-Morilla, 2020; Sidney et al., 2017). No obstant això, la funció de promoure un bon ambient de treball no sempre és atesa en l'àmbit organitzacional, ni és exclusiva d'una àrea específica (Bowen, 2008). A més de la revisió documental sistemàtica realitzada, s'utilitza la base de dades Web of Science per a l'estudi bibliomètric i el mapatge de xarxes de la literatura científica, de la qual s'extreuen els articles per analitzar-los en diferents cerques bibliogràfiques. A partir de la informació obtinguda, s'utilitza el programari VOSviewer per a l'anàlisi de les xarxes bibliomètriques referides a autoria, citació i coocurrència de paraules clau en les publicacions científiques. El nombre d'articles publicats sobre la gestió de la felicitat i el benestar en les organitzacions per l'àrea de les relacions públiques ha augmentat significativament en l'última dècada, encara que s'ha produït un canvi notable en aquest creixement a partir de 2021. Segons la recerca, els programes de responsabilitat social corporativa consideren cada vegada més aquests aspectes com a part de la seva estratègia organitzativa, i departaments com el de recursos humans assumeixen un major protagonisme en la generació d'un bon ambient de treball. Aquest estudi ofereix una visió general de la producció internacional de publicacions científiques sobre el tema de la gestió de la felicitat i el benestar organitzacional des del punt de vista de les relacions públiques. Mostra l'evolució de l'activitat científica quant al nombre de treballs difosos per àrea de coneixement i les tendències actuals quant a autoria, temàtica i repercussió en l'àmbit científic.

Paraules clau: relacions públiques; felicitat; benestar; organitzacions; bibliometria

Resumen. *Análisis bibliométrico y mapeo de redes de la literatura científica sobre la influencia de las relaciones públicas en el bienestar y la felicidad*

La gestión de la felicidad y el bienestar de los empleados como estrategia organizativa ofrece resultados positivos para las empresas, tal y como ha sido ampliamente estudiado en la literatura científica. En el ámbito de las relaciones públicas, los estudios publicados abordan estos beneficios tanto individual como colectivamente: para los empleados (Pérez, 2020) y para la entidad para la que trabajan, ya sean intangibles o tangibles (Castro-

Martínez y Díaz-Morilla, 2020; Sidney et al., 2017). Sin embargo, la función de promover un buen ambiente de trabajo no siempre es atendida en el ámbito organizacional, ni es exclusiva de un área específica (Bowen, 2008). Además de la revisión documental sistemática realizada, se utiliza la base de datos Web of Science para el estudio bibliométrico y el mapeo de redes de la literatura científica, de la que se extraen los artículos para su análisis en diferentes búsquedas bibliográficas. A partir de la información obtenida, se utiliza el software VOSviewer para el análisis de las redes bibliométricas referidas a autoría, citación y coocurrencia de palabras clave en las publicaciones científicas. El número de artículos publicados sobre la gestión de la felicidad y el bienestar en las organizaciones por el área de las relaciones públicas ha aumentado significativamente en la última década, aunque se ha producido un cambio notable en este crecimiento a partir de 2021. Según la investigación, los programas de responsabilidad social corporativa consideran cada vez más estos aspectos como parte de su estrategia organizativa, y departamentos como el de recursos humanos asumen un mayor protagonismo en la generación de un buen ambiente de trabajo. Este estudio ofrece una visión general de la producción internacional de publicaciones científicas sobre el tema de la gestión de la felicidad y el bienestar organizacional desde el punto de vista de las relaciones públicas. Muestra la evolución de la actividad científica en cuanto al número de trabajos difundidos por área de conocimiento y las tendencias actuales en cuanto a autoría, temática y repercusión en el ámbito científico.

Palabras clave: relaciones públicas; felicidad; bienestar; organizaciones; bibliometría

1. Introduction and theoretical foundations

In the international scientific literature, there has been growing interest in the last decade in studies relating to happiness and well-being in the workplace, whether from the perspective of the worker or from the point of view of the company, both in terms of reputation specifically and economic performance generally (Álvarez-Nobell and Muñiz-Velázquez, 2013; Barbeito-Veloso and Perona-Páez, 2019).

Today, businesses such as the consulting firm Great Place to Work help companies improve their workplaces, through exclusive benefits for employees, opportunities for professional improvement or public recognition of their performance. They also publish annual rankings of top places to work, in their list World's Best Workplaces (2021). In 2021, organisations such as the Observatorio de Comunicación (2021) highlighted companies that had adapted to changes caused by the global coronavirus pandemic by promoting internal communication as a tool to boost the performance of workers and the links between them, both when remote working or when returning to the workplace. As Núñez-Sánchez, Gómez-Chacón and Jambrino-Maldonado (2021) show, it is advisable to maintain constant communication with employees, using all the digital tools at our disposal.

Authors such as Huettermann and Bruch (2019) point out that the link between human resource management of the psychological well-being employees and the performance of the organisation is modified by conditioning factors: a positive employee stress mindset, a climate of transforma-

tional leadership in companies, and collective commitment. Fisher (2010) adds that happiness and positive attitudes depend on the individual employee's perception and interpretation of external environments or events. However, as far as the other studies analysed in this paper are concerned, the relationship between the actions that the organisation directs towards promoting a good working environment and the response of its workers is more direct.

The strategic management of internal communication has been recognised by authors such as García-Uceda (2016) and Cuenca-Fontbona and Verazzi (2018) as a key practice to bring about change in an organisation through the transmission of values relating to the motivation and pride of employees to belong to a certain organisation. This practice within the company leads, as Díaz-Soloaga (2019) emphasises, to a strengthening of the internal corporate culture which directly relates to greater efficiency in the productivity of its workers. In this sense, the introduction of intangible assets such as satisfaction, well-being and happiness in the work environment (Barbeito-Veloso and Perona-Páez, 2019; Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla, 2020) bring tangible benefits to the organisation. Their evidence is found in studies such as Sidney et al. (2017) in which well-being improvement programmes carried out in companies are evaluated and monetised through the analysis of medical costs. In the same vein, Page and Vella-Brodrick (2009) highlight employee well-being as a critical factor in achieving organisational success.

In the specific field of public relations, authors such as Aced (2013) and Teixeira, Cardoso and Pimenta (2015) were already recommending corporate communication management nearly a decade ago, defining it as the activity aimed at reinforcing those intangible aspects referred to among internal audiences: key agents in the process of identification of employees with organisational objectives (Cuenca-Fontbona and Verazzi, 2018). Published studies address these benefits both individually and collectively for workers (Pérez, 2020).

According to Acosta et al. (2015), organisational reputation emerges as an extra-organisational outcome of healthy firms, thus adding to intra-organisational outcomes such as performance. They propose the inclusion of organisational reputation in future updates of the healthy firm model.

Having a person responsible for the management of well-being and happiness and the design of spaces for sharing and relaxation (D'Almeida and Libaert, 2018; Perez, 2020), and a supervisor of the company's social climate (Beau, 2019) is becoming increasingly widespread. This is corroborated by the increase in the number of articles published on the subject and the growth in the number of citations these works receive (Rando-Cueto et al., 2022a). Indicators of the good work of what Beau (2019) calls *Chief Happiness Officer* include the quality of communication and internal relations that lead to loyalty and commitment on the part of employees, demonstrated, for example, by a lower rate of absenteeism. The management of the working relationship

thus has an impact on the way people feel and therefore on their productivity (Cassar and Buttigieg, 2015).

However, the function of fostering a good work climate is not always attended to in the workplace, nor is it always exclusive to a particular area (Bowen, 2008). Although support for basic human rights is reflected in public relations documents, researchers such as Berman and Logsdon (2011) are sceptical about the actual behaviour of companies towards their employees.

At present, although this subject of study continues to arouse interest in the scientific community, in 2021 there was a slight decrease in the number of studies published on happiness management and corporate well-being. This decline is significant if the focus of the study is on the influence of public relations. Scholars on the subject, such as Albors-Alonso and Paricio-Esteban (2016) and Castro-Martínez and Díaz-Morilla (2020), point out in this regard that, in parallel with the extensive development of internal communication management in organisations, it is often linked to departments such as human resources and, more recently, within the area of corporate social responsibility (CSR).

The main objectives of this research are as follows:

- O1. To identify and contextualize the main studies on public relations and happiness/well-being that appear on the Web of Science Core Collection database, and to analyse their evolution over time.
- O2. To analyse the influence of public relations in the management of well-being and happiness in the workplace, according to the studies published in scientific publications.
- O3. To present visually and show in an easily understandable way the results of the work on the current state of research activity in the field of public relations management and its significance in the improvement of professionals.

2. Methodology

For the bibliometric analysis, a search of the Web of Science (WoS) Core Collection database was used to select records for further analysis, as this is considered to be an accurate, reliable and leading source for scientific analysis (Cabeza-Ramírez, Sánchez-Cañizares and Fuentes-García, 2017; Martínez et al., 2015). The criteria for selecting the search terms used are summarised in Table 1, and were conditioned by the systematic review of the previous literature. In this way, concepts that are most prevalently used in the published research are considered; and the number of records found that can offer valid conclusions after analysis of the results is taken into account. For the process of selection of search terms, English was chosen as the standard language of science (Shock et al., 2016). Most scientific manuscripts, even when written in another language, show abstract or bibliographic information in English, so they are also included in the search results.

Based on the process followed by De las Heras et al. (2022) in their article on business management of happiness, the term “public relations” was ultimately considered to be an essential concept in the publications searched, given the focus of the study. Alongside this term, the concepts of “happiness” or “well-being” appear in the publications searched.

In order to make the process as specific as possible and to carry out an in-depth study, it was decided to restrict the publications of the more than 4,000 articles in which different terms related to the business field are included to those 148 in which only studies relating to public relations and its influence on well-being and happiness are included.

Table 1. Results of the main WoS Core Collection searches for the bibliometric analysis

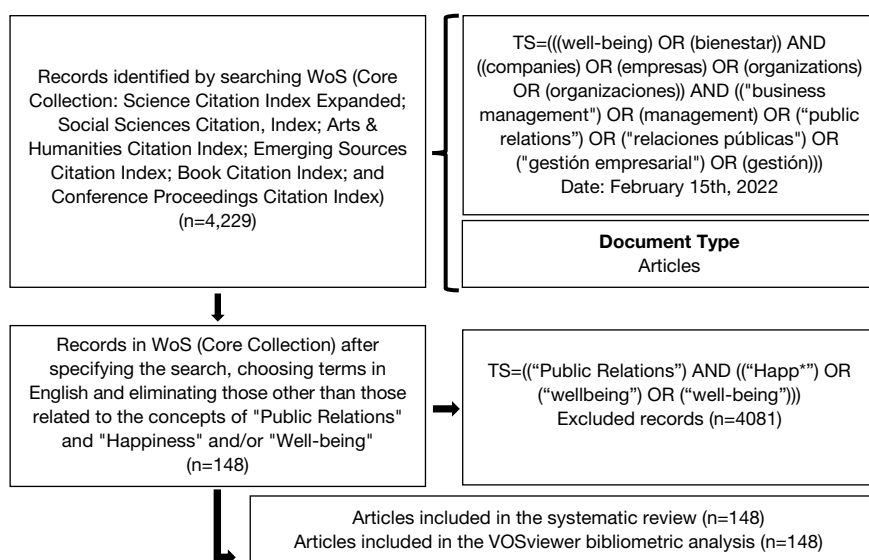
	Date	Searches	Publications
1	15/02/22	TS=((well-being) OR (bienestar)) AND ((companies) OR (empresas) OR (organizations) OR (organizaciones)) AND ((“business management”) OR (management) OR (“public relations”) OR (“relaciones públicas”) OR (“gestión empresarial”) OR (gestión)))	4,229
2	15/02/22	TS=((well-being) OR (bienestar)) AND ((organizations) OR (organizaciones)) AND ((“business management”) OR (management) OR (“public relations”) OR (“relaciones públicas”) OR (“gestión empresarial”) OR (gestión)))	3,600
3	15/02/22	TS=((well-being) AND (companies) AND (“business management”) OR (management) OR (“public relations”)))	932
4	15/02/22	TS=((“Public Relations”) AND (“Happ”) OR (“wellbeing”) OR (“well-being”)))	148

Following Chen’s (2017) guidelines on bibliometric analysis, scientific and visual tools and indicators, the design and methodological resources used in this study are based on a previous systemic review of the scientific literature. The bibliometric technique used is scientific or science mapping (Vallejo-Correa, Monsalve-Pulido and Tabares-Betancur, 2021; Ballesteros-Ricaurte et al., 2021) to obtain the predominant topics that have been published on public relations and their influence on the happiness and well-being of individuals, as well as their evolution over time.

The software used in this case is VOSviewer. This tool allows for the construction and visualisation of bibliometric networks, and their subsequent interpretation. Following the approach of Sánchez-Núñez, De las Heras-Pedrosa and Peláez (2020), this study presents the nets of: author keywords; citations and subject areas; citations and indexed journals; authors and geographical areas where a greater number of records are published; and authorship and affiliated institutions with greater scientific production.

The flowchart of the bibliographic search and selection process is shown in Figure 1, according to previous research models (Jambrino-Maldonado et al., 2022; Rando-Cueto et al., 2022b). The criteria for the selection of search terms were conditioned by the systematic review of the previous literature,

Figure 1. Flowchart of bibliographic search and selection process (Jambrino-Maldonado et al., 2022; Rando-Cueto et al., 2022b)



incorporating the most recurrent concepts in the publications analysed based on the subject of the study, the sample of the selected records and their specificity, in order to carry out an in-depth analysis.

3. Results

One of the results that stands out before starting the computational analysis of the scientific mapping is the number of studies found. Without using any filter, that is, with a sample without any temporal, geographical or linguistic limitation, the overall number of published papers which include the terms “public relations”, “wellbeing” or “well-being”, or with the root “happ-” was 148 (on 15th February 2022). Despite not being an outstanding number of published works (on WoS), there has been an increase in the number of scientific studies published over the years, with the appearance of articles being exceptional and irregular until 2008, when the curve of both the number of publications and citations of articles begins to rise significantly, reaching its maximum in 2020. After 2020, the decline in the following year is remarkable (Figure 2).

Table 2 shows the interest of the scientific community in the influence of public relations practice on happiness and well-being. This is shown by the fact that the average citation rate per article is more than 15, and by the nearly 2,300 citations of the 148 records found. Moreover, these figures

increase significantly as the period analysed progresses. The H index for the works with the highest number of citations is 16, which means that 16 publications have been mentioned in bibliographical references at least this number of times.

Figure 2. Times cited and publications over time

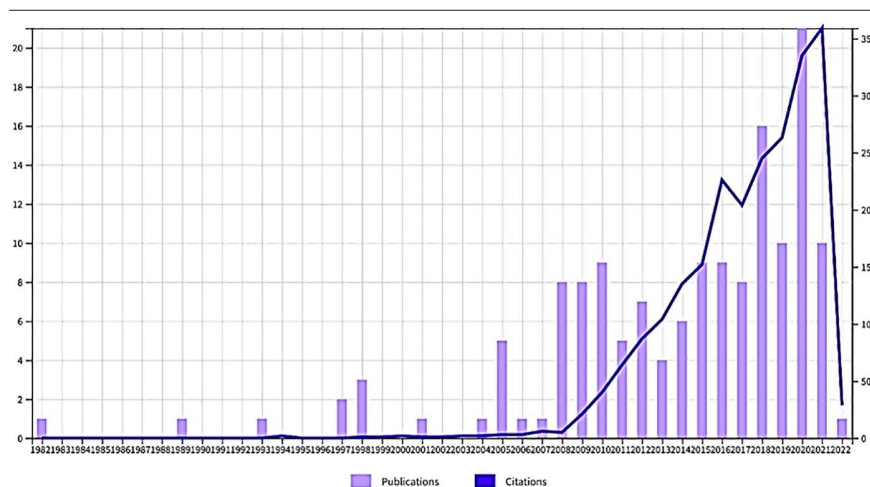
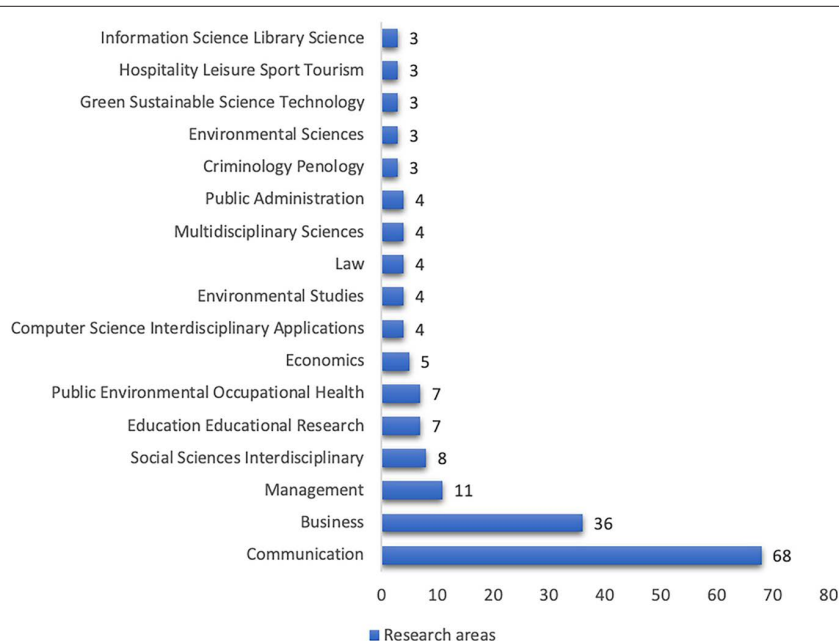


Table 2. Citation Report

Citation Report	
Publications	148
Times Cited	2,293
Average citation per item	15.49
H-Index	16

3.1. Author keyword analysis

The analysis of keywords that the authors select from their works shows which subject matter in the scientific literature is more prevalent, both in terms of the most common concepts and in terms of the strength of the relationship between them. The VOSviewer software is used to generate the network of co-occurrence of keywords, as shown in Figure 3. In this case, in the analysis of the influence of public relations on people's happiness and well-being, 1,397 keywords are used from the 148 publications in the sample. 29 different groupings, or clusters, of concepts were obtained (Figure 3), differentiated in the figure by colours. The size of names and circles are proportional to the frequency and strength of the connections (Van Eck and Waltman, 2010).

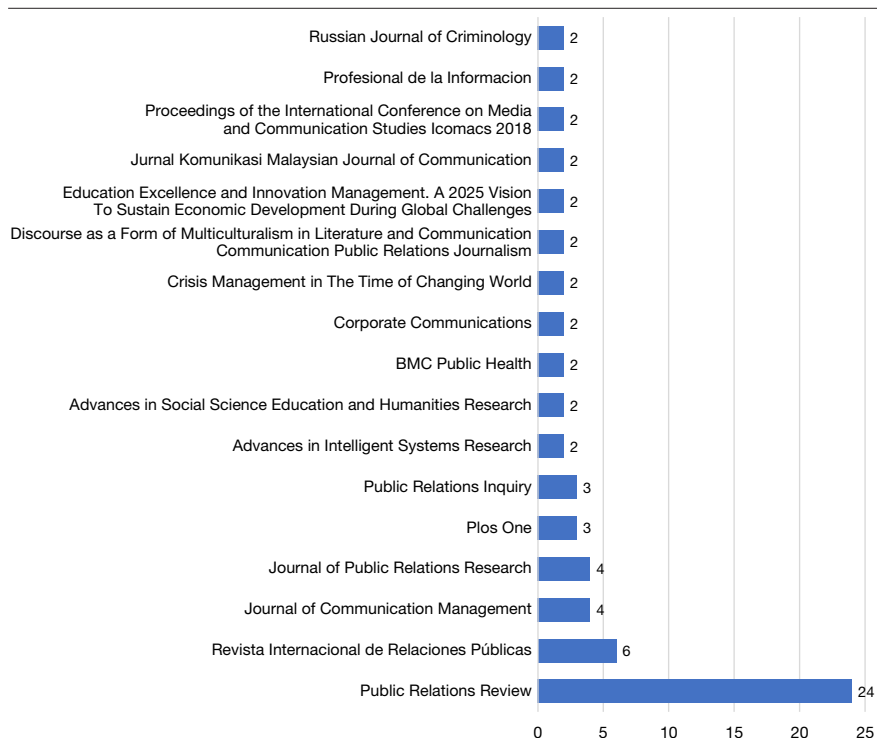
Figure 4. Main subject areas

The *Journal of Communication Management* and the *Journal of Public Relations Research* also cover topics relating to the influence of public relations on the happiness and well-being of individuals, with four works published each; and *Plos One* and *Public Relations Inquiry* with three each. The rest of the published research is spread across different scientific publications, as shown in Figure 5 of the journals with more than two published works on the subject of this study.

3.3. Analysis of authors and citation of records

In the case of the paper found, their authorship is not defined by a concentration of articles; that is, the most prominent researchers in terms of the number of works published do not have more than two published studies each. Moreover, the co-occurrence between authors is practically nil, which shows a remarkable autonomy when working on the subject.

However, in terms of citations, there are papers with a significant total number of citations and average number of citations per year. Table 3 shows, in descending order, the twenty most cited papers in the scientific field, each with more than 15 citations, indicating their authorship, year and publication medium. The table shows keywords or main theme, thus reflecting which topics are the most cited throughout the years of study.

Figure 5. Publications with the highest number of papers published

The list of most cited articles does not include any of the most recent years (from 2019 to 2022), with 2018 being the most recent year included in Table 3. The highest number of citations of published works occurs between 2008 and 2011.

Table 3. Ranking of the twenty articles with the highest number of citations

Authors	Papers - keywords	Citations	Average Citation per year
Brown (2008)	“Design Thinking”. Harvard Business Review. – No keywords. This author states as key aspects in the implementation of a public relations campaign: “empathy”, “integrative thinking”, “optimism”, “experimentalism” and “collaboration”.	1,259	83.93
Pollard et al. (2008)	“Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption: success of the Western Australian Go for 2&5 campaigns”. Public Health Nutrition. – fruit, vegetables, social marketing, campaign, nutrition intervention.	102	6.8

Liu, Ho and Lu (2017)	"Recent Themes in Social Networking Service Research". PLoS One. – community structure, research fronts, United-States, Twitter, Facebook, online, sites, communication, time, displays.	91	15.17
Stephens and Malone (2009)	"If the Organizations Won't Give Us Information...: The Use of Multiple New Media for Crisis Technical Translation and Dialogue". Journal of Public Relations Research. – No keywords. The research provides messaging strategies in crisis situations to include those used through a variety of new media.	78	5.57
Bowen (2008)	"A State of Neglect: Public Relations as 'Corporate Conscience' or Ethics Counsel". Journal of Public Relations Research. – No keywords. Study of the role of corporate conscience in the public relations function, ethical counseling among public relations professionals.	76	5.07
Claeys and Cauberghe (2012)	"Crisis response and crisis timing strategies, two sides of the same coin". Public Relations Review. – public relations, crisis response strategies, crisis timing strategies, reputation, credibility.	62	5.64
Ordeix and Duarte (2009)	"From Public Diplomacy to Corporate Diplomacy: Increasing Corporation's Legitimacy and Influence". American Behavioral Scientist. – public diplomacy, corporate diplomacy, public relations, legitimacy, social responsibility, public agenda, public interest.	49	3.5
Mickey (1997)	"A postmodern view of public relations: Sign and reality". Public Relations Review. – No keywords Analysis of postmodernism as a critical theory to provide insight into modern public relations practice.	32	1.23
Ninaus et al. (2015)	"Benefits and stressors – Perceived effects of ICT use on employee health and work stress: An exploratory study from Austria and Hong Kong". International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-Being. – work-related technology use, ICT stressors, ICT benefits, work stress, burnout, employee health.	31	3.88
Shrewsbury et al. (2009)	"A randomized controlled trial of a community-based healthy lifestyle program for overweight and obese adolescents: the Loozit study protocol". BMC Public Health. – weight-management program, physical-activity, childhood overweight, behavior-change, blood-pressure, children, interventions, maintenance, internet, tracking.	30	2.14
O'Neil (2007)	"The link between strong public relationships and donor support". Public Relations Review. – fundraising, nonprofits, organizational-public relationships, stewardship.	28	1.75
De Bussy and Kelly (2010)	"Stakeholders, politics and power: Towards an understanding of stakeholder identification and salience in government". Journal of Communication Management. – stakeholder analysis, politics, Australia, corporation.	24	1.85

Avery (2010)	"The role of source and the factors audiences rely on in evaluating credibility of health information". Public Relations Review. – public relations, public health, sources, credibility.	22	1.69
Hege et al. (2018)	"Occupational health disparities among U.S. long-haul truck drivers: the influence of work organization and sleep on cardiovascular and metabolic disease risk". PLoS ONE. – shift work, psychosocial factors, national-survey, mental-health, stress, environment, association, prevalence, obesity, population.	21	4.2
Eckert et al. (2018)	"Health-Related Disaster Communication and Social Media: Mixed-Method Systematic Review". Health Communication. – quality.	17	3.4
Gómez et al. (2011)	"Sponsorship of physical activity programs by the sweetened beverages industry: public health or public relations?". Revista de Saude Pública – nutrition, public health, physical activity, soft drinks, soft drinks industries, conflict of interest.	17	1.42
Plaisance (2016)	"Media Ethics Theorizing, Reoriented: A Shift in Focus for Individual-Level Analyses: Media Ethics Theorizing, Reoriented". Journal of Communication. – media ethics, media sociology, virtue theory, moral psychology, public-relations, values.	16	2.29
Wilson et al. (2013)	"Trust makers, breakers and brokers: building trust in the Australian food system". BMC Public Health. – food, trust, food scare, food safety, Australia, United Kingdom, consumers, perception, media, risk.	16	1.6
Canel (2012)	"Communicating strategically in the face of terrorism: The Spanish government's response to the 2004 Madrid bombing attacks". Public Relations Review. – government communication, strategic communication, terrorism, framing.	16	1.45
Vujnovic and Kruckeberg (2005)	"Imperative for an Arab model of public relations as a framework for diplomatic, corporate and nongovernmental organization relationships". Public Relations Review. – arab model of public relations, communication technology, "cold war", globalization, "hot war", ideological/political/economic systems, interpersonal communication, mass communication, moral/ethical values, organic theory of public relations, relationship-building, ritual communication, transmission of information.	16	0.89

3.4. Analysis of the most cited papers

Of the works highlighted in the above ranking, the first three stand out, both in terms of the number of citations and the citation rate per year. Thus, Brown (2008: 3), in his article on "Design thinking", states the following as key aspects in the implementation of a public relations campaign in the business environment: "empathy", "integrative thinking", "optimism", "experimentalism" and "collaboration".

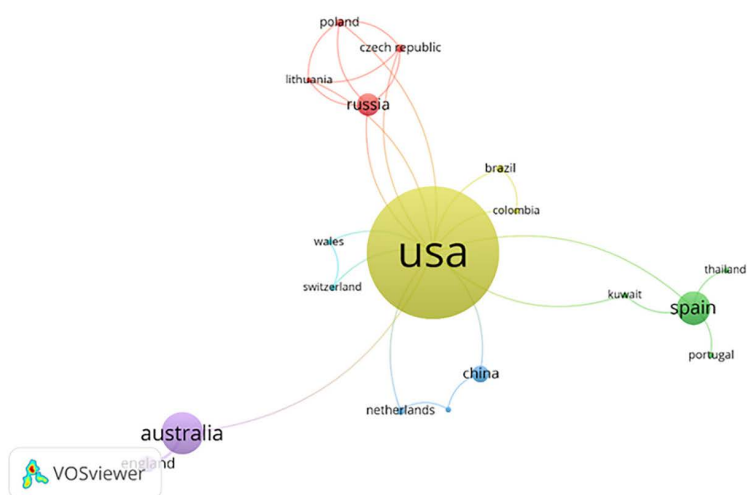
Pollard et al. (2008) study the relevance of nutritional habits for the well-being of the individual and the way in which these can be promoted through social marketing campaigns, maintained over time and correctly developed. And in the case of Liu et al., (2017), these authors carry out a bibliometric study of the scientific literature on content in social networks, among which public relations interrelated with the following subjects stand out: Improving Health, Adolescent Health, Sentiment and Trend in Microblogs, Romantic Relations, Microblogging Politics and Journalism.

3.5. Analysis of main co-authorships - countries and number of registrations

The analysis of the geographical areas with the highest number of published research studies is represented with a co-occurrence map, which visually expresses not only the most prolific places in terms of production, but also the international relationships established in terms of scientific production on public relations and happiness or social welfare (Figure 6). At the same time, a chorochromatic map (Figure 7) shows the geographical location of the places where the greatest production of papers has been published.

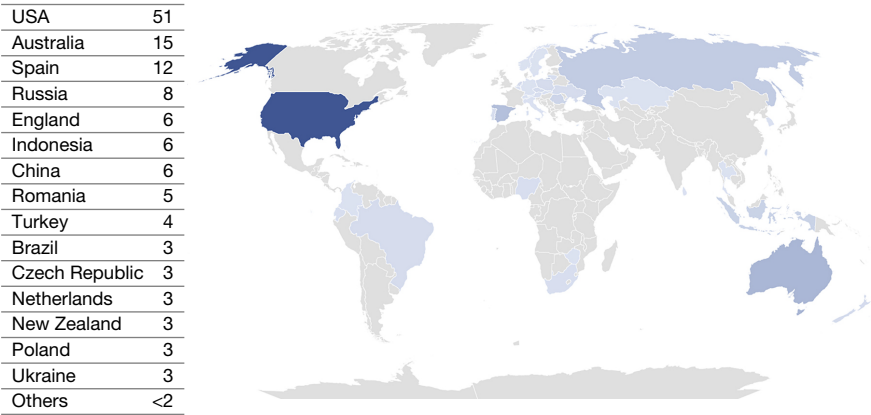
In the first case (Figure 6), the USA appears as the predominant area in the publication of scientific articles and as a link with other regions, notably the following (by size and strength of relationship with other countries): Australia, linked with England; Spain, linked with Thailand, Portugal and Kuwait; Russia, linked with Poland, the Czech Republic and Lithuania; and China, linked with the Netherlands.

Figure 6. Geographical areas with the greatest influence on scientific production and their links



In the second figure (Figure 7), the most important geographical areas are practically the same, with the addition of others which, although they have notable scientific production, their relationship with authors from other countries is not so strong.

Figure 7. Chorochromatic mapping of geographical areas with scientific production



3.6. Analysis of main co-authors – organisations and number of published studies

Figure 8 shows how universities, both public and private, are the mainstay of scientific production, with the University of Washington being the organization with the strongest relationships with other American and European organizations in terms of scientific production.

Figure 8. Most influential international affiliations (greater scientific output and strength of relationship with other entities)

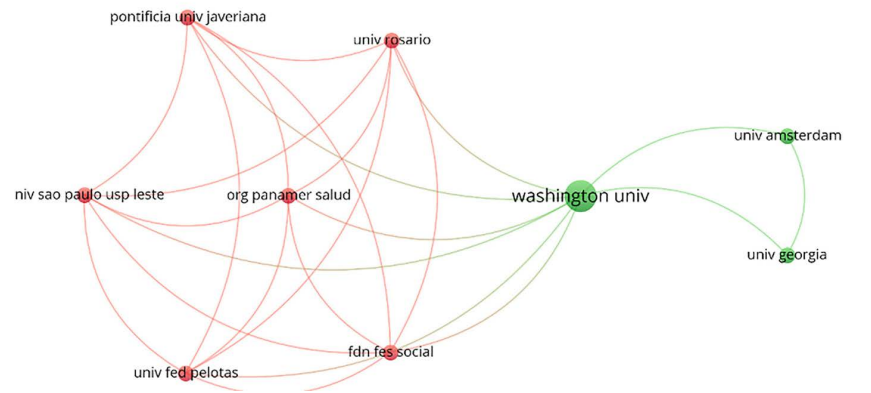


Table 4 shows the four universities with more than two published papers on public relations and its relationship with happiness and well-being, as well as the percentage that this number represents of the total number of published articles. In addition, it shows the classification of these organisations according to indicators of two rankings that place universities according to their global reputation in the period: the QS World University Rankings 2022 and the Academic Ranking of World Universities 2021 (ARWU) (Sánchez-Núñez et al., 2020).

Table 4. Prestigious and influential universities

Classification	Organisation	Articles	% Total	QS 2022	ARWU 2021
1	University of Texas Systems (at Austin)	4	2.67	67	41
2	California State University System (at San Diego)	3	2	48	18
3	University of Tennessee Knoxville	3	2	541-550	201-300
4	University of Tennessee System (Health Science Center)	3	2	-	901-1000

4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of the literature reviewed in this article, on the influence of public relations on human happiness and well-being, reflects a growing interest in this subject in the scientific community. Over the years, more and more studies have been published showing the benefits of public relations actions, campaigns or initiatives in the workplace, both in the personal and professional spheres of people – both of which are mutually reinforcing. However, the analysis shows that this is still not a field of study with a large volume of research published in journals of scientific impact, particularly because since 2021 it seems that the various concepts overlap; areas such as human resources and corporate social responsibility gain ground against public relations, and are given greater weight and independence in the structure of organisations. However, in terms of citation, papers with a high number of citations and average number of citations per year have been found.

The second objective is drawn, first of all, from the clusters and their visual representations created by VOSviewer software, which highlights the groups of terms related to the workplace as one of the singular aspects in the study of their relationship with happiness or well-being. Also, for the most influential authors, according to the key concepts they choose in their works, “public relations” and “social media” are closely related to corporate communication actions and crisis management in communication, as well as to corporate social responsibility actions. This analysis shows the most outstanding trends in public relations and happiness/well-being management. This conclusion is corroborated in the study of the predominant thematic areas: *communication*, *business* and *management*.

With regard to key publications, with the exception of the *Public Relations Review* and the *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, a significant number of publications (more than 200) include between one and four articles, so that the decision to publish in one or other medium is not defined by the authors. The same is true of the organisations with which they are affiliated.

Finally, the United States ranks as the area with the highest number of articles on public relations and happiness and well-being management – public relations origins and a long tradition in human resources management. However, Australia and Spain also stand out, both in terms of the number of works published on the subject (most of which are more recent), as well as in terms of their relationships with other geographical areas (Figure 7).

It should be noted that all the studies used for this analysis are indexed on Web of Science (WoS); academic research that may be registered on other databases or repositories with different quality criteria was not considered. This is one of the greatest limitations of the study, although WoS was chosen because it covers a significant percentage of quality literature and offers more thorough citation analysis (Falagas et al., 2008). Another limitation was the selection of articles published in English. A low percentage of studies written in other languages were left out of the research, although English is chosen as the standard language of science (Shock et al., 2016) and because for the vast majority of studies, even if the full text is not in English, their abstract and bibliographic information do appear in English.

Taking into account the above-mentioned limitations, the results described above provide an overview of the scientific literature on public relations and happiness/well-being over time, thus fulfilling the first objective.

As future lines of research, we plan to carry out a bibliographic search in other databases that can be compared to the WoS Core Collection, as well as to extend the time period of the bibliometric study.

Bibliographical references

- ACED TOLEDANO, C. (2013). “Web 2.0: the origin of the word that has changed the way we understand public relations”. In: *Representing PR: Images, identities and innovations*. Barcelona International PR Conference, 1-12.
- ACOSTA, H., CRUZ-ORTIZ, V., SALANOVA, M. and LLORENS, S. (2015). “Organizaciones saludables: Analizando su significado desde el Modelo HERO”. *Revista de Psicología Social*, 30 (2), 323-350.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/21711976.2015.1016751>>
- ALBORS-ALONSO, M. and PARICIO-ESTEBAN, P. (2016). “La comunicación de la prevención de salud en los programas de responsabilidad social corporativa de empresas farmacéuticas implantadas en España. El caso de Novartis, Roche, Sanofi, Grifols”. *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, VI (11), 47-72.
<<https://doi.org/10.5783/revrrpp.v6i11.404>>
- ÁLVAREZ-NOBELL, A. and MUÑIZ-VELÁZQUEZ, J. A. (2013). “Felicidad y desarrollo de la cultura en las organizaciones, un enfoque psicosocial”. *Revista de Comunicación*, 12 (1).

- AVERY, E. (2010). "The role of source and the factors audiences rely on in evaluating credibility of health information". *Public Relations Review*, 36 (1), 81-83.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2009.10.015>>
- BALLESTEROS-RICAURTE, J. A., AVENDAÑO-FERNÁNDEZ, E., GONZÁLEZ-AMARILLO, A. M. and GRANADOS-COMBA, A. (2021). "Mapeo científico en la búsqueda de información. Caso de estudio: enfermedades infecciosas en bovinos". *Revista Científica*, 42 (3), 265-275.
<https://doi.org/10.14483/23448350.17532>
- BARBEITO-VELOSO, M. L. and PERONA-PAEZ, J. J. (2019). "Comunicación organizacional en clave sonora: el caso de Blink, los podcasts de BBVA". *El Profesional de la Información*, 28 (5).
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.sep.11>>
- BEAU, P. (2019). "Un nouveau gestionnaire: le «responsable du bonheur". *Gestion*, 44 (2), 34-37.
<<https://doi.org/10.3917/riges.442.0034>>
- BERMAN, M. and LOGSDON, J. M. (2011). "Business obligations for human rights: any progress from rhetoric to practice?". *Proceedings of the International Association for Business and Society*, 22, 189-201.
- BOWEN, S.A. (2008). "A State of Neglect: Public Relations as 'Corporate Conscience' or Ethics Counsel". *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 20 (3), 271-296.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260801962749>>
- BROWN, T. (2008). "Design Thinking". *Harvard Business Review*, 86 (6), 84-92, 141.
- CABEZA-RAMÍREZ, L. J., SÁNCHEZ-CAÑIZARES, S. and FUENTES-GARCÍA, F. (2017). "Entrepreneurship as a dynamic field of study: A bibliometric analysis of research output". *Tourism & Management Studies*, 13 (3), 59-71.
<<https://doi.org/10.18089/tms.2017.13307>>
- CANEL, M. J. (2012). "Communicating strategically in the face of terrorism: The Spanish government's response to the 2004 Madrid bombing attacks". *Public Relations Review*, 38 (2), 214-222.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.11.012>
- CASSAR, V. and BUTTIGIEG, S. C. (2015). "Psychological contract breach, organizational justice and emotional well-being". *Personnel Review*, 44 (2), 217-235.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-04-2013-0061>>
- CASTRO-MARTÍNEZ, A. and DÍAZ-MORILLA, P. (2020). "Internal communication and happiness and wellbeing management in Spanish companies". *El Profesional de la Información*, 29 (3).
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.24>>
- CHEN, C. (2017). "Science Mapping: A Systematic Review of the Literature". *Journal of Data and Information Science*, 2 (2), 1-40.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/jdis-2017-0006>
- CLAEYS, A. S. and CAUBERGHE, V. (2012). "Crisis response and crisis timing strategies, two sides of the same coin". *Public Relations Review*, 38 (1), 83-88.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2011.09.001>>
- CUENCA-FONTBONA, J. and VERAZZI, L. (2018). *Guía fundamental de la comunicación interna* (1st ed.). Barcelona: Editorial UOC.
- D'ALMEIDA, N. and LIBAERT, T. (2018). *La communication interne des entreprises*. Malakoff: Dunod.

- DE BUSSY, N. and KELLY, L. (2010). "Stakeholders, politics and power: Towards an un-derstanding of stakeholder identification and salience in government". *Journal of Communication Management*, 14 (4), 289-305.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/13632541011090419>>
- DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C., JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C., RANDO-CUETO, D. and IGLESIAS-SÁNCHEZ, P. P. (2022). "COVID-19 Study of Scientific Articles in Health Com-munication: A Science Mapping Analysis in Web of Science". *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19 (3), 1705.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19031705>>
- DÍAZ-SOLOAGA, P. (2019). "The role of communication in organizational culture. Is there a pattern in Spanish fashion companies?". *El Profesional de la Información*, 28 (5).
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2019.sep.06>>
- ECKERT, S., SOPORY, P., DAY, A., WILKINS, L., PADGETT, D., NOVAK, J., NOYES, J., ALLEN, T., ALEXANDER, N., VANDERFORD, M. and GAMHEWAGE, G. (2018). "Health-Related Disaster Communication and Social Media: Mixed-Method Systematic Review". *Health Communication*, 33 (12), 1389-1400.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10410236.2017.1351278>>
- FALAGAS, M. E., PITSOUNI, E. I., MALIETZIS, G. A. and PAPPAS, G. (2008). "Comparison of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar: strengths and weaknesses". *FASEB journal: official publication of the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology*, 22 (2), 338-342.
<<https://doi.org/10.1096/fj.07-9492LSF>>
- FISHER, C. (2010). "Happiness at work". *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 12 (4), 384-412.
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2370.2009.00270.x>>
- GARCÍA-UCEDA, E. (2016). "Gestión estratégica de la comunicación interna. Un caso de red informal en una organización educativa". *Opción*, 32 (7), 684-706.
- GÓMEZ, L., JACOBY, E., IBARRA, L., LUCUMÍ, D., HERNANDEZ, A., PARRA, D., FLORINDO, A. and HALLAL, P. (2011). "Sponsorship of physical activity programs by the sweetened beverages industry: public health or public relations?". *Rev Saude Publica*, 45 (2), 423-427.
<<https://doi.org/10.1590/s0034-89102011000200022>>
- HEGE, A., LEMKE, M. K., APOSTOLOPOULOS, Y. and SÖNMEZ, S. (2018). "Occupational health disparities among U.S. long-haul truck drivers: the influence of work organization and sleep on cardiovascular and metabolic disease risk". *PLoS One*, 13 (11), e0207322.
<<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0207322>>
- HUETTERMAN, H. and BRUCH, H. (2019). "Mutual Gains? Health-Related HRM, Collective Well-Being and Organizational Performance". *Journal of Management Studies*.
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/joms.12446>>
- JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C., RANDO-CUETO, D., NÚÑEZ-SÁNCHEZ, J. M., IGLESIAS-SÁNCHEZ, P. P. and DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C. (2022). "Bibliometric Analysis of International Scientific Production on the Management of Happiness and Well-Being in Organizations". *Social Sciences*, 11, 272.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci11070272>>

- LIU, J. S., HO, M. H. and LU, L.Y. (2017). "Recent Themes in Social Networking Service Research". *PLoS One*, 12 (1), e0170293.
<<https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0170293>>
- MARTÍNEZ, M. A., HERRERA, M., CONTRERAS, E., RUÍZ, A. and HERRERA-VIEDMA, E. (2015). "Characterizing highly cited papers in Social Work through H-Classics". *Scientometrics*, 102 (2), 1713-1729.
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-014-1460-y>>
- MICKEY, T. J. (1997). "A postmodern view of public relations: Sign and reality". *Public Relations Review*, 23 (3), 271-284.
<[https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111\(97\)90036-9](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0363-8111(97)90036-9)>
- NINAUS, K., DIEHL, S., TERLUTTER, R., CHAN, K. and HUANG, A. (2015). "Benefits and stressors – Perceived effects of ICT use on employee health and work stress: An exploratory study from Austria and Hong Kong". *International Journal of Qualitative Studies on Health and Well-being*, 10, Article 28838.
<<https://doi.org/10.3402/qhw.v10.28838>>
- NÚÑEZ-SÁNCHEZ, J., GÓMEZ-CHACÓN, R. and JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C. (2021). "Digital Tools for Adapting Corporate Wellness Programmes to the New Situation Caused by COVID-19: A Case Study". In: SAÑUDO CORRALES, B. and GARCÍA-FERNÁNDEZ, J. (Eds). *Innovation in Physical Activity and Sport*. Tapasconference 2020. Lecture Notes in Bioengineering. Springer, Cham.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-92897-1_9>
- OBSERVATORIO DE COMUNICACIÓN INTERNA (2021). Date consulted: 8th April 2022. Retrieved from: <<http://www.observatoriocomunicacioninterna.es/ganadores-xii-premios-oci/>>.
- O'NEIL, J. (2007). "The link between strong public relationships and donor support". *Public Relations Review*, 33 (1), 99-102.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2006.11.021>>
- ORDEIX, E. and DUARTE, J. (2009). "From Public Diplomacy to Corporate Diplomacy: Increasing Corporation's Legitimacy and Influence". *American Behavioral Scientist*, 53 (4), 549-564.
<<https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764209347630>>
- PAGE, K. M. and VELLA-BRODRICK, D. A. (2009). "The 'What', 'Why' and 'How' of Employee Well-Being: A New Model". *Social Indicators Research*, 90, 441-458.
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-008-9270-3>>
- PÉREZ, K. (2020). "Back to childhood: non-verbal reading and making sense in workplace technology companies". *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, X (20), 201-222.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.5783/RIRP-20-2020-11-201-222>>
- POLLARD, C. M., MILLER, M. R., DALY, A. M., CROUCHLEY, K. E., O'DONOGHUE, K. J., LANG, A. J. and BINNS, C. W. (2008). "Increasing fruit and vegetable consumption: success of the Western Australian Go for 2&5 campaign". *Public Health Nutrition*, 11 (3), 314-320.
<<https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980007000523>>
- PLAISANCE, P. (2016). "Media Ethics Theorizing, Reoriented: A Shift in Focus for Individual-Level Analyses: Media Ethics Theorizing, Reoriented". *Journal of Communication*, 66 (3), 454-474.
<<https://doi.org/10.1111/jcom.12230>>
- RANDO-CUETO, D., NÚÑEZ-SÁNCHEZ, J. M., JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C., DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C. and IGLESIAS-SÁNCHEZ, P. (2022a). "La gestión orga-

- nizacional de la felicidad y el bienestar en la literatura científica". In: RAVINA-RIPOLL, R. (Coord.) (2022). *El Happiness Management*. Valencia: Tirant lo Blanch.
- RANDO-CUETO, D., JAMBRINO-MALDONADO, C., IGLESIAS-SÁNCHEZ, P. P. and DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C. (2022b). "Trends and Evolution of Research on Women's Entrepreneurship and Communication in the Scientific Literature". *Journal Media*, 3 (4), 665-681.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/journalmedia3040044>>
- SÁNCHEZ-NÚÑEZ, P., DE LAS HERAS-PEDROSA, C. and PELÁEZ, J. I. (2020). "Opinion Mining and Sentiment Analysis in Marketing Communications: A Science Mapping Analysis in Web of Science (1998–2018)". *Social Sciences*, 9 (3), 23.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci9030023>>
- SCIENCEDIRECT. Retrieved from: <https://www.sciencedirect.com/>. Date consulted: 8th April 2022.
- SHREWSBURY, V. A., O'CONNOR, J., STEINBECK, K. S., LEE, A., HILL, A. J., KOHN, M. R., SHAH, S., THORVALDSEN, S. and BAUER, L. A. (2009). "A randomised controlled trial of a community-based healthy lifestyle program for overweight and obese adolescents: the Loozit® study protocol". *BMC Public Health*, 9, 119.
<<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-9-119>>
- SHOCK, C., SHOCK, M., SHOCK, C. and REITZ, S. (2016). "Writing Scientific Journal Manuscripts in English". *HortScience*, 51 (4).
<<https://doi.org/10.21273/HORTSCI.51.4.316>>
- SIDNEY, J. A., JONES, A., COBERLEY, C., POPE, J. E. and WELLS, A. (2017). "The well-being valuation model: a method for monetizing the nonmarket good of individual well-being". *Health services & outcomes research methodology*, 17 (1), 84-100.
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10742-016-0161-9>>
- STEPHENS, K. K. and MALONE, P. C. (2009). "If the Organizations Won't Give Us Information...: The Use of Multiple New Media for Crisis Technical Translation and Dialogue". *Journal of Public Relations Research*, 2 (2), 229-239.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/10627260802557605>>
- TEIXEIRA, S., CARDOSO, P. and PIMENTA, N. (2015). "A Newsletter no Contexto das Relações Públicas e da Comunicação Digital: o sector dos serviços de saúde e bem estar em Portugal". *International Journal of Marketing, Communication and New Media*, 3 (5).
- VALLEJO-CORREA, P., MONSALVE-PULIDO, J. and TABARES-BETANCUR, M. (2021). "A systematic mapping review of context-aware analysis and its approach to mobile learning and ubiquitous learning processes". *Computer Science Review*, 39, e100335.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.cosrev.2020.100335>>
- VAN ECK, N. J. and WALTMAN, L. (2010). "Software Survey: VOSviewer, a Computer Program for Bibliometric Mapping". *Scientometrics*, 84, 523-538.
<<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-009-0146-3>>
- VUJNOVIC, M. and KRUCKEBERG, D. (2005). "Imperative for an Arab model of public relations as a framework for diplomatic, corporate and nongovernmental organization relationships". *Public Relations Review*, 31 (1), 338-343.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2005.05.018>>
- WILSON, A., COVENEY, J., HENDERSON, J., MEYER, S., CALNAN, M., CARAHER, M., WEBB, T., ELLIOTT, A. and WARD, P. (2013). "Trust makers, breakers and

brokers: building trust in the Australian food system”. *BMC Public Health*, 13, 229.

<<https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2458-13-229>>

WORLD’S BEST WORKPLACES (2021). Great Places to Work. Retrieved from: <<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/worlds-best-workplaces>>. Date consulted: 8th April 2022.

Advertising and public relations degrees: profiles and the glass ceiling in the Spanish labour market

Gloria Jiménez-Marín

Universidad de Sevilla

gloria_jimenez@us.es

Víctor Álvarez-Rodríguez

Universidad de Cádiz

victor.alvarez@uca.es

Isabel Palomo-Domínguez

Mykolas Romeris University

isabel.palomo@mruni.eu



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: December 2022

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: JIMÉNEZ-MARÍN, G.; ÁLVAREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, V. and PALOMO-DOMÍNGUEZ, I. (2022). "Advertising and public relations degrees: profiles and the glass ceiling in the Spanish labour market". *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 87-104. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3555>>

Abstract

According to data from the Spanish Association of Advertising Agencies, 90% of management positions in communication companies are occupied by men. However, the percentage of women studying communication degrees in Spanish universities, and specifically bachelor's and master's degrees in advertising and public relations, is higher than that of male students. This study evaluates the gender perspective taught in advertising and public relations degrees in Spain, to determine whether society demands this female vision of communication, PR, advertising and institutional and corporate activity. Furthermore, it gathers opinions on the role of women in the structure of communication companies. Based on triangulation, the methodology combines a content analysis of university syllabi, a questionnaire for students or graduates, and a panel of experts made up of academics teaching degree courses in advertising and public relations and communication practitioners. The results point to adequate and constantly (r)evolving training, in which skills and curricula meet the professional environment. Factors such as crisis, digital progress, the expansion of new work formats and the new role of the consumer require multidisciplinary teams with transversal skills – where women have a significant role to play.

Keywords: advertising; gender; glass ceiling; job placement; university; women

Resum. *Titulacions de publicitat i relacions públiques: perfils i sostre de vidre al mercat de treball espanyol*

Segons dades facilitades per l'Associació Espanyola d'Agències de Publicitat, el 90% dels llocs directius de les empreses de comunicació estan ocupats per homes. No obstant això, el percentatge de dones que cursen graus de Comunicació i, concretament, graus i màsters de Publicitat i Relacions Públiques a les universitats espanyoles és superior al dels estudiants masculins. Aquest estudi avalua la perspectiva de gènere que es dona a les titulacions de Publicitat i Relacions Públiques a Espanya per determinar si la societat exigeix aquesta visió femenina de la comunicació, les relacions públiques, la publicitat i l'activitat institucional i corporativa. A més, recull l'opinió sobre el paper de la dona en l'estructura de les empreses de comunicació. A partir de la triangulació, la metodologia combina una anàlisi de contingut dels plans d'estudis, un qüestionari per a estudiants o titulats, i un panel d'experts format per acadèmics del Grau de Publicitat i Relacions Públiques i per professionals. Els resultats apunten a una formació adequada i en constant (r)evolució, en la qual les competències i els plans d'estudis s'ajusten a la realitat professional. Factors com la crisi, el progrés digital, l'expansió de nous formats de treball i el nou paper del consumidor requereixen equips multidisciplinaris amb competències transversals, on les dones tenen un paper important.

Paraules clau: publicitat; gènere; sostre de vidre; llocs de treball; universitat; dones

Resumen. *Titulaciones de publicidad y relaciones públicas: perfiles y techo de cristal en el mercado laboral español*

Según datos de la Asociación Española de Agencias de Publicidad, el 90% de los puestos directivos de las empresas de comunicación están ocupados por hombres. Sin embargo, el porcentaje de mujeres que estudian carreras de Comunicación y, en concreto, grados y másteres de Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas en las universidades españolas es superior al de los estudiantes varones. Este estudio evalúa la perspectiva de género que se da en las titulaciones de Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas en España para determinar si la sociedad demanda esta visión femenina de la comunicación, las relaciones públicas, la publicidad y la actividad institucional y empresarial. Además, recoge la opinión sobre el papel de la mujer en la estructura de las empresas de comunicación. Basada en la triangulación, la metodología combina un análisis de contenido de los planes de estudio, un cuestionario para estudiantes o graduados, y un panel de expertos formado por académicos pertenecientes al Grado de Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas y por profesionales. Los resultados apuntan a una formación adecuada y en constante (r)evolución, en la que las competencias y los planes de estudio responden a la realidad profesional. Factores como la crisis, el avance digital, la expansión de nuevos formatos de trabajo y el nuevo papel del consumidor exigen equipos multidisciplinarios con competencias transversales, en los que la mujer tiene un papel relevante.

Palabras clave: publicidad; género; techo de cristal; puestos de trabajo; universidad; mujeres

1. Introduction

1.1. Glass ceiling

In recent decades, women have multiplied their presence in the workplace (Flego and Ortega, 2020). Nevertheless, their role differs significantly from that of male colleagues in terms of equality. The report *Gender Diversity in Senior Positions and Firm Performance: Evidence from Europe*, published by the International Monetary Fund (Christiansen et al., 2016), shows that in 600 large European companies, women held only 19% of senior positions. Even less are the 4% of female CEOs in these companies. These figures reveal a clear shortfall from the 40% target set by the European Commission for 2020, which, in 2021, has still not been reached.

This scenario, daily articulated in the work teams of most industries, is also true in the business field of advertising. Communication is a profession where the scarce presence of women in managerial positions stands out (Caro et al., 2007).

Many researchers have studied the situation of women in managerial roles in Spanish communication. Recently, various studies have addressed the issue, explaining the situation as due to certain specific characteristics of the advertising industry, such as the fact that in creative services departments the dominant culture is highly masculine (Nixon, 2003). Moreover, some authors identify additional organisational barriers in the advertising industry: demanding and irregular working hours, which do not favour work-family balance (Mallia, 2009); the lack of activities for supporting women (Klein, 2000); the lack of female role models in creative leadership positions (Pool, 2001); and the lack of policies to support work-family balance (Martín, 2007).

In the 21st century, undergraduate students doing university degrees relating to advertising and public relations are predominantly female (Corredor and Farfán, 2010). Meanwhile, according to research by the General Association of Advertising Companies (2000), the profile of managers in agencies was already predominantly male at the beginning of the current millennium. Despite the evidence (Hernández, Martín and Beléndez, 2008), there is also a glimpse of change (Melgar, 2019).

In Spain, the report published by Martín (2007) in collaboration with the Spanish Association of Advertising Agencies is notable in its gender perspective. According to this study, women represent 56% of the advertising labour market; and the departments with the highest proportion of women are production (56%), research (63%), accounts (72%) and public relations (83%). However, women only represent 33% of creative staff, and are barely found in the positions of art directors (33%) or copywriters (40%). This study also shows that men occupy 90% of top management positions while women remain in middle management positions.

The main consequences of this gender division of labour are wage differentials and unequal job opportunities for female advertising executives.

Women were paid 10 to 25% less than men in the advertising industry in 2005, and women in senior positions earn only 70% of the average salary of men (Farris, 2005). Moreover, female executives tend to be lower paid, which can lead to a pay gap between male-dominated (creative) and female-dominated (account services) advertising departments (Ocaña and Luque, 2007).

In this regard, there are two additional problems in the advertising industry. First, a lack of equal representation of men and women in print and broadcast advertising, and the transmission of gender stereotypes that legitimise and perpetuate gender inequalities and discrimination (Simancas-González, 2019). Second, a vertical and horizontal segregation of personnel in advertising agencies based on gender (Martín-Llaguno and Navarro-Beltrá, 2015), with men dominating management positions and creative departments, which are the most prestigious ones (Alvarado-López and Martín-García, 2020; Montes and Roca, 2016).

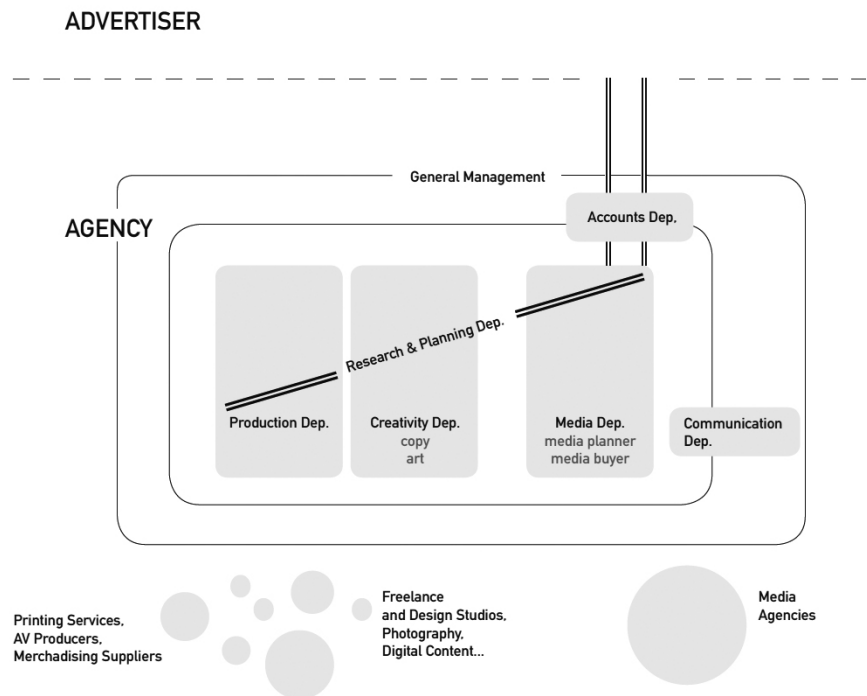
Thus, single, white men between 25 and 35 years old rule the advertising industry (Cuneo and Petrecca, 1997). Consequently, the standards of advertising creativity are masculine and discriminatory (Cadwalladr, 2005). To challenge this situation, the association #MujeresCreativas was founded in Spain, as an “open, independent and collaborative platform (...) that works for visibility and equal opportunities in the sector” (Melgar, 2019).

As the website <www.masmujerescreativas.com> states, in Spain most advertising graduates are women, but in the creative departments of agencies, only 20% are women; of the country's creative directors, only 14% are women; among chief creative directors, the figure drops to 1%. And yet 80% of buying power is held by women (Jiménez-Marín, Simancas-González and González-Oñate, 2022).

1.2. New professional profiles in the field of communication

The advertising communication business has always been (and will always be) in constant revolution. We must add the arrival of the digital revolution and the expansion of online media, which have led to a new media scenario in which these act as essential catalysts for profound transformations in the advertising industry (Corredor-Lanas, 2011). The arrival of the internet into the advertising business brought revolutionary changes. It affected the organisational structures of advertising agencies and advertiser companies. It has also influenced consumers and how they relate to brands (De-Salas, Martínez and Roca, 2019).

It is essential to know what the advertising system requires from the workplace in order to respond to the challenges posed by the current professional scenario. For this purpose, and given that it is not easy to design a unique organisational chart model that applies to all advertising agencies, a map is proposed as an alternative to the traditional organisational chart (Palomo-Domínguez, 2022):

Figure 1. Basic map of advertiser-agency relations

Source: Palomo-Domínguez (2022).

Diversity is a hallmark of today's advertising agency: diversity in its specialisation, and diversity in its structures, whether larger or smaller, where outsourcing of services is frequent. Also, flexibility, since the typical division of departments in an agency is clear but not fixed, including accounts, strategy, production, media and creativity.

This new scenario calls for multidisciplinary teams with transversal skills, new knowledge that is constantly updated, skills directly related to the digital world and, above all, a new vision when it comes to an understanding of the relationship between brands and society (Gutiérrez and Recalde, 2018). The demonstration of professional skills is key to the competitiveness of agencies (Sánchez-Moreno, 2019). The so-called professional talent (technical skills and abilities) is what currently provides differential value in the results offered by agencies. Problem-solving profiles and constructive feedback skills have become values demanded by companies that do not only belong to the advertising business (Castellblanque, 2006).

Moreover, according to the InfoAdex report (2020), for the first time, digital media occupies the leading position by volume of investment, with an overall growth of 8.8%; and a higher volume of advertising investment com-

pared to previous years. So digital media generated 38.6% of the total investment in 2019.

This increase in investment in digital media by advertising companies has driven the demand not only for new professional profiles but also the transformation of current ones that include new skills and areas of expertise (Carretón-Ballester and Lorenzo-Sola, 2016; Hernández, 2010).

1.3. The discipline of advertising and PR in Spanish universities

Against this backdrop of new and future profiles, the role of efforts to train future professionals in their passage through universities, business schools and creative schools is key. University studies in the European Higher Education Area (EEES) focus their teaching on models that concentrate on problem-based learning, project-based work, network teaching or the skill-oriented teaching model. However, the rhythms of business and academia are very different. There is a gap between the training received and the demands of the professional environment.

Additionally, the presence of women is very limited in university curricula. This lack of female role models becomes a lack of knowledge of primary cultural references and the social undervaluing of women (Carretón-Ballester and Lorenzo-Sola, 2018). As a result, there is no education in equal opportunities; and inequality and discrimination against women are fostered (López-Navajas, 2015).

Regarding university communication studies, the effective incorporation of the gender perspective is still not guaranteed (Elías-Zambrano, Barrientos-Bueno and Ramírez-Alvarado, 2022). Although regulations and legislation oblige the curricula to include content that enables the acquisition of skills around equality (Fernández-Galarza and Postigo-Sánchez, 2016), the effective incorporation of the gender perspective is not certain.

2. Objectives

The work-family balance of people with degrees related to communication, especially female graduates, is very complicated in practical terms, which makes very evident the glass ceiling for women to ascend to top management positions in communication companies (Jiménez-Marín et al., 2022; Caro et al., 2007). From a gender perspective, faced with the prominence of eminently male management staff in communication companies, several questions arise:

- RQ1. Does the advertising business require a more female approach?
- RQ2. Is a radical transformation of the curricula necessary to achieve equality in the private communication sector?
- RQ3. Are there an increasing number of female managers?
- RQ4. Should equality in the private communication sector be enforced?

The present research approaches the professional and academic situation by analysing communication studies (advertising and public relations) at university level. It also focuses on students and practitioners to contribute to the advancement and possible improvement of academic performance and competitiveness.

Based on scientific literature and previous scientific works, this study attempts to confirm the following hypotheses:

- H1: The exercise of advertising activity in Spain calls for greater involvement of advertising profiles exercised by female roles.
- H2: There is no need for a radical transformation of university curricula for the degree course in advertising and public relations, but there is a need for a more comprehensive adaptation to the gender perspective.
- H3: Women are gradually and progressively reaching managerial positions in communication companies, so advertising activity is becoming more feminised.

The objectives that lead on from these hypotheses are as follows:

- O1. To evaluate the adequacy of the training received on degree courses in advertising and public relations in Spain, paying attention to those specific subjects with a gender perspective, to confirm if the syllabus meets the demands of the professional advertising sector.
- O2. To determine whether society demands a more female vision both in the communication industry itself and in the advertising and institutional and corporate communication it produces.
- O3. To find out opinions regarding the current role of women in communication companies, on equality, and its possible obligatory nature in the private sphere of communication.

3. Methodology

The research takes a mixed methodology approach based on triangulation (Yin, 1989). First, a quantitative-qualitative content analysis describes the curricula of communication studies at Spanish universities (Silverman, 2016; Igartua-Perosanz, 2006; Krippendorff, 2004). Next, a mass questionnaire (Martínez, 2002) investigates the opinions of students and graduates of communication degrees. To complement this, a Delphi study (Gideon, 2012) gathers the opinions of experts (academics and communication professionals) on the results obtained in the two previous phases, the content analysis and the questionnaire (see Table 1).

Table 1. Research methodology employed

	Technique	Corpus/profile of interviewees	Objective
PHASE 1	Content analysis	Syllabus of degree in Advertising and Public Relations	Objective 1
PHASE 2	Survey	Graduate students and teaching and research staff	Objective 2
PHASE 3	Delphi	Advertising professionals	Objective 3

Source: Own elaboration from Sanz-Marcos, Jiménez-Marín and González-Oñate (2021).

3.1. Phase 1: Content analysis

The first phase begins with an analysis of the syllabi of degree courses in advertising and public relations. For this, an exhaustive documentary review was carried out of all the syllabi of public and private university institutions in Spain that offer such courses. This review included all the degree courses found through the university degree search engine on the ANECA website (*Libro Blanco. Títulos de Grado en Comunicación*, 2005), accessed in 2022. The syllabi of 28 Spanish universities were reviewed: One in Alicante, six in Barcelona, one in Cádiz, one in Cantabria, one in Castellón de la Plana, one in Girona, one in the Balearic Islands, six in Madrid, one in Málaga, two in Murcia, one in Navarra, one in Pontevedra, one in Seville, two in Valencia, one in Valladolid, and one in Vizcaya. The documentary review was carried out in February 2022 and referred to the study plans for the 2021/2022 academic year.

An earlier analysis of communication subjects in Spanish MBAs by Matilla, Cuenca-Fontbona and Compte-Pujol (2018) inspired the instrumental design of the content analysis. The research questions included the following variables:

- Province where each centre is located.
- Name of the university, and type (private or public).
- Name of the subjects relating to creativity.
- Number and percentage of ECTS credits assigned to each subject.
- Type of subject (compulsory or optional).
- Year in which it is taught.

These criteria were applied to all the syllabi published on the websites of the different universities, following the pattern of analysis in the study by Sanz-Marcos et al. (2021).

3.2. Phase 2: Quantitative surveys

A multi-response questionnaire (Martínez, 2002) evaluated and determined whether society demands a more female vision both in the communication industry itself and in the advertising and institutional and corporate communication it produces. The sample included graduate students of degrees in advertising and public relations, and teaching and research staff. The survey

was carried out using the Google Forms platform, and SPSS software was used for data mining. The questionnaires were completed between 15 January and 15 February 2022. A total of 327 questionnaires were filled in, of which 279 were valid. The questionnaire, consisting of eight closed multi-response questions, was structured according to thematic blocks (Sanz-Marcos et al., 2021), as follows:

- Current employment situation.
- Skills developed.
- Estimation of the difference in training between male and female students.
- Incorporation into the world of work.
- Assessment of equality in communication companies.

The student sample was selected according to the following criteria:

- Graduates who are already incorporated into the labour market as active employees in the advertising sector, either employed or self-employed.
- Workers in the advertising industry with higher education in fields different than communication degrees: administrative, legal, accounting, etc.

Additionally, given that teaching staff play a crucial role in students' understanding and training, the survey included 25 lecturers and research staff. As with the questionnaire for graduates, this was carried out using the Google Forms platform and subsequently analysed using SPSS software. The fieldwork occurred between 16 February and 15 March 2022. The criteria for sample selection were full-time teaching and research staff teaching on degree courses in advertising and public relations.

The questionnaire for teaching staff included 10 closed, multiple-choice questions based around three thematic blocks linked to the propositions highlighted by the studies discussed above:

- Block 1: Respondent profile.
- Block 2: Assessment of the curricula of the degree course in advertising and public relations.
- Block 3: Assessment of the glass ceiling in the activity of advertising.

3.3. Phase 3: Delphi

After completing phases one and two, a panel of experts was consulted (Linstone and Turoff, 2002). The experts belong to the following Spanish advertising or PR agencies or platforms: C de C (E1), Más Mujeres Creativas (E2), Dircom Andalucía (E3), El Ruso de Rocky (E4) and McCann Erickson (E5).

The criteria for selecting the experts was based on two fundamental concepts: their affinity with the subject of study, and their reputation in the professional field.

The panel was consulted electronically and included:

- A report, based on the results obtained in the previous phases.
- An open-ended questionnaire, with questions aimed at demonstrating and justifying these results, thus requiring a direct intervention of the participants.

The experts' responses were divided into verbal categories using Dimensions software, and the interview data were transcribed according to thematic areas. The results were presented by thematic category to address the questions being analysed. Each expert's contribution was identified using quotation marks, and linked to a code previously assigned to each person, for anonymity and data protection. This code appears in brackets, where the E refers to the term expert, followed by the number corresponding to that person, according to the sequential order attributed.

4. Results

4.1. Content analysis

A total of 28 curricula from public and private universities in Spain were analysed, along with their related subjects (compulsory or optional). The total population of teaching subjects was 1,568. Of these, only 19 universities (and curricula) were included in the analysis, as they are the only ones that explicitly address the gender perspective and the glass ceiling in their syllabi and teaching.

After analysing the respective curricula documents (teaching programmes and projects) for all the subjects that make up the 240 credits of the degree courses in advertising and public relations, five universities were found to devote the most significant weight to gender issues: Ramón Llull-Blanquerna University, the University of Malaga, the University of Seville, the University of Alicante and the University of Cadiz. These data confirm some of the issues raised by Gómez-Colell et al. in 2016.

The analysis revealed that the terms most frequently used in the teaching programmes and projects regarding this topic were "gender", "stereotypes", "glass ceiling" and "discrimination".

It should be noted that there are hardly any differences between the type of institution (public or private).

Regarding the number of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS) of the subjects that address the topic of advertising from a gender perspective, no significant differences are found: 100% of these subjects have six ECTS. This result could be considered to be predictable, since

six is the mode value; in other words, the most frequent number of credits per subject at Spanish universities.

Regarding the typology of these subjects, most of them are optional subjects. These data, at the very least, indicate that this is a subject which, as it is not a compulsory course, can be assumed not to have an impact on the student's training in terms of obtaining their degree.

4.2. Survey

The results indicate that the 279 valid respondents (out of a total of 327 respondents, of which 48 were invalid) come from a wide variety of universities:

Table 2. Universities

Academic institution	Graduates
University of Alicante	47
Pompeu Fabra University	32
King Juan Carlos University	29
University of Seville	28
Jaume I University	17
University of Malaga	16
Complutense University of Madrid	14
University of Cadiz	13
Autonomous University of Barcelona	10
University from País Vasco	10
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	10
University of Vic	9
University Camilo José Cela	9
Cardenal Herrera-CEU	9
University Católica de Murcia	8
University of Salamanca	7
University of Valladolid	6
University of Girona	5

Source: Own elaboration.

The data show that 38.71% (108) of those surveyed were employed in the advertising sector at the time the survey was carried out. Of these 108, 89.8% are employed by others, leaving 10.2% as self-employed or freelance.

In this sense, the skills obtained during training and professional development included the following skills: digital skills (approximately 70% or 195 respondents), account management (20% or 56 respondents), production (3% or 8 respondents) and media planning (3% or 8 respondents). Other skills such as purely commercial activities, administration and economic management, documentation, product design, graphic design, event organisation and teaching make up the rest of the skills developed during the job.

The evaluation block regarding development of the gender perspective during university training, as evaluated by the respondents, reveals that approximately 5% (14) consider that the subjects dedicated to knowing and breaking the glass ceiling are “sufficient”, 31% (88) “acceptable” and 63% (177) “insufficient”.

The results also showed that the 25 teaching staff are employed at the institutions shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Lecturers or professors

Academic institution	Teaching staff
Jaume I University	4
University of Alicante	4
Pompeu Fabra University	3
University of Cadiz	3
Complutense University of Madrid	3
University of Seville	3
King Juan Carlos I University	1
University of Malaga	1
Universitat Oberta de Catalunya	1
Pompeu Fabra University	1
Ramon Llul University	1

Source: Own elaboration.

The second section, aimed at evaluating the study plans of the degree courses in advertising and public relations, shows that the teaching methodology is mostly considered insufficient. More specifically, 80% of the academics consulted point out that the gender perspective was only implemented very recently and “it is still an issue to be developed”. 12% (three respondents) consider that the current treatment of the gender issue in the curricula is adequate, while 8% (two respondents) consider that the current treatment is already “excessive”.

The third block presents a solid position. None of the respondents stated that the glass ceiling is a minor issue and that the university should not deal with it. The 25 teachers surveyed stated the need to address inequality in university education to a greater or lesser extent.

4.3. Delphi

Those consulted on university training show a certain deficit in training in equality and gender perspective. In fact, the experts point out that:

This issue should not only correspond to the university even if it is a university task. (E2)

This must be worked on from the bottom up, from school. (E1)

[and] in society itself. It must be talked about, and awareness must be raised about how difficult it really is for women to access management positions. (E5)

They also said that:

The day we stop talking about it, it will be that the glass ceiling does not exist. (E3)

Nevertheless, it is a reality that we women advertisers face every day. (E4)

Sometimes people look the other way because until now there was no data and we worked on conjecture; but now there is no excuse: we are many more women trained in communication and strategic skills, and we are still fewer. (E1)

All the experts agree that this issue requires global visibility, not only in the university:

Remember the campaign of the runner and the heels? That's how it is. It is our daily reality. (E4)

From a male point of view, it was almost unquestioned until a few years ago. We went to work, we got to high positions quickly, and we ordered in a vertical way. It is the clear image of *Mad Men*. But this is not so publicly tolerated today, although it is still done. Women's assertion of their rights is fundamental. (E2)

It is notable that entrepreneurship or self-employment emerges from the experts' opinions, without being suggested by the researchers in this study:

For a woman, although less and less, it is much more complicated than for a man. But, as women tend to be more resolute, they leave and set up on their own when they see that their morale is being affected. And that is why there are more and more communication management companies led by women and made up almost entirely of women. They are more decisive and, if they see that there is a problem for their promotion, they look for it on their own. (E5).

Self-employment is increasingly an option. Women, and since teleworking has become so popular, are starting to decide that they do not want to go down when they can do perfectly well (or better) in an employed job in a company where they do not get promoted. So many go off and set up companies, start-up or become self-employed and find their own clients, but now, working under their own rules. They start to be in charge. (E3)

All the experts point out the main qualities of women working in the communication industry:

They are decisive. (E1)

Women... multitasking. (E2)

I think that women communication professionals are more empathetic with the person in front of them, and that makes them better in this profession. (E3)

Women tend to be more tireless than men in their efforts, which does not mean that they put in more hours. What's more, I think (I don't know, I don't have real data) that they are more efficient because they do the same thing using fewer resources (starting with their time). (E4)

[Women] are starting to be so aware of their capabilities that they don't put up with any kind of nonsense. But, this situation is right now: ten years ago, they didn't get promoted and had no personal life, and they kept holding on until they exploded and gave it all up; today they don't. Today they get tired of holding on and giving up. Today they are tired of putting up with it and want to continue doing what they like, what they were trained to do, but under their rules. So today these women are tired... And they set up the Club de las Malasmadres. (E5)

Concerning the training received by Advertising and PR students, all the participants say that they are unaware of the actual training situation in this sense. However:

I have a slight (ironic) suspicion that this subject is not dealt with very much in universities. Suppose a student in the first year of her degree learns about the reality of the job market that awaits her and has the critical spirit and the capacity for information that students have nowadays. Do you think she won't put up a barricade? (E2)

It is also interesting to note that, when talking about the concept of equality, all five experts are in favour of its existence; however, their opinions vary when considering a mandatory gender equality rate in private institutions:

That there should be more women in communication companies, of course; that they should lead more, of course; that I think there are few of them, of course. But that they should be forced to do so... I'm not so sure. (E1)

It may be that this equality may even go against them because there are many more women than men with degrees. It would be a question of looking at the numbers and even seeing how to draft this possible legislative point that would make it compulsory. But, I don't know; I would have to compare and look at examples of countries where this has worked: does Sweden or Norway have such an obligation in the private sector? (E4)

5. Conclusions

The data obtained in the different stages of this study offer an inspiring starting point: the need to deal with the gender perspective in a transversal manner and to become aware of the current direct or indirect discrimination in the workplace.

Concerning the first objective, which aims to evaluate the adequacy of the training received, the research concludes that there are few subjects in which the gender perspective is included in the syllabi and teaching projects (which does not mean that it cannot be dealt with in the classes).

The optional nature of the subjects where the gender perspective is dealt with proves that the entire syllabus (240 ECTS, four academic years) can be completed without dealing with concepts such as the glass ceiling or female roles in the structure of advertising.

Regarding the second objective, to find out whether society demands a more female vision, both in the communication industry itself and in the advertising and institutional and corporate communication it produces, the trend observed among students, teachers and professionals emphasises that, as a professional society becomes more educated and more female, there is also a need for more managerial positions with women in those roles.

Regarding the third objective, to find out the opinion on the current role of women in communication companies, on equality and on its possible obligatory nature in the private sphere of communication, it is clear that there is almost a need to have more women in management and leadership positions in communication companies, so that equality can exist.

The results of this triple methodology study demonstrate a certain efficiency in the sector regarding incorporation into the marketplace. As already advanced in previous studies (Sanz-Marcos et al., 2021), there are hardly any unemployed people in the sector, and graduates in advertising and public relations in Spanish universities are mainly women (Alvarado-López and Martín-García, 2020). However, considering all of the above, the practice of advertising activity in Spain calls for greater involvement of women in the industry. A radical transformation of the university curricula for the degree course in advertising and public relations is not necessary, but a more notable adaptation to the gender perspective is required. Since female profiles are gradually and progressively reaching managerial positions in communication companies, communication, advertising and PR activity are becoming more feminised.

Bibliographical references

- ALVARADO-LÓPEZ, M.C. and MARTÍN-GARCÍA, N. (2020). "Techos de cristal en la industria publicitaria española: profesionales femeninas tras las campañas galardonadas en los premios a la eficacia de la comunicación comercial (2002-2018)". *El profesional de la información*, 29 (3), e290314.
<<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.14>>

- ANECA (2005). *Libro Blanco. Títulos de Grado en Comunicación*. Madrid: ANECA. Retrieved from <https://www.aneca.es/documents/20123/63950/libroblanco_comunicacion_def.pdf/0c0517b1-d2bd-b726-123c-4b30a7c3be5e?t=1654601743040>.
- CADWALLADR, C. (2005, october 23). "Focus: Sexism row: This advertising boss thinks women make 'crap' executives". *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <<https://www.theguardian.com/media/2005/oct/23/advertising.genderissues>>.
- CARO, F. J.; GARCÍA-GORDILLO, M. M.; RODRÍGUEZ, C. and JIMÉNEZ-MARÍN, G. (2007). "Techo de cristal en las empresas periodísticas: percepción de las habilidades y capacidades de la mujer en las tareas de dirección". *Ámbitos*, 16, 395-407.
- CARRETÓN-BALLESTER, M. C. and LORENZO-SOLA, F. (2016). "Competencias demandadas por las organizaciones del mercado de trabajo en publicidad y relaciones públicas: El caso de la provincia de Alicante". In: MATILLA, K. (coord.). *Casos de estudio de relaciones públicas: sociedad conectada: empresas y universidades*. Barcelona: UOC, 155-182.
- (2018). "Las prácticas curriculares definen los perfiles y las competencias para el mercado laboral en relaciones públicas (2017- 2018)". *Communication Papers*, 7 (15), 105-119.
- CASTELLBLANQUE, M. (2006). *Perfiles profesionales de publicidad y ámbitos afines: ¿qué quiero ser? ¿Qué quiero hacer? ¿Para qué tengo talento?* Barcelona: UOC.
- CHRISTIANSEN, L.; LIN, H.; PEREIRA, J.; TOPALOVA, P. and TURK, R. (2016). "Gender Diversity in Senior Positions and Firm Performance: Evidence from Europe". *IMF Working Papers*, 16/50. Retrieved from <<https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/wp/2016/wp1650.pdf>>.
- CORREDOR-LANAS, P. (2011). "Nuevos profesionales en publicidad". *Telos*, 87, 1-5. Retrieved from <<https://telos.fundaciontelefonica.com/archivo/numero087/nuevos-profesionales-en-publicidad/>>.
- CORREDOR-LANAS, P. and FARFÁN MONTERO, J. (2010). "Demandas y formación: Nuevos perfiles profesionales para la Publicidad en España". *Pensar la Publicidad. Revista Internacional de Investigaciones Publicitarias*, 4 (1), 97-116. Retrieved from <<https://revistas.ucm.es/index.php/PEPU/article/view/PEPU1010120097A>>.
- CUNEO, A. Z. and PETRECCA, L. (1997). "Women target boys club of ad creatives". *Advertising Age*, 68, 24-45.
- DE-SALAS-NESTARES, I.; MARTÍNEZ-SÁEZ, J. and ROCA-HUESO, V. (2019). "Los nuevos perfiles profesionales como elemento transformador de la industria publicitaria". *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, 10 (2), 11-28. <<https://doi.org/10.14198/MEDCOM2019.10.2.16>>
- ELÍAS-ZAMBRANO, R.; BARRIENTOS-BUENO, M. and RAMÍREZ-ALVARADO, M. M. (2022). "Medios de comunicación y educación. La necesidad de la Educomunicación en la formación universitaria Española". In: SÁDABA CHALEZQUER, C.; NÚÑEZ GÓMEZ, P. and PÉREZ TORNEO, J.M. (coord.). *La alfabetización mediática e informacional en las facultades de comunicación en España*. Salamanca: Comunicación Social Ediciones, 87-101.
- FARRIS, K. (2005). "Motivated reasoning and social category bias". Proceedings of the *American Academy of Advertising USA*.
- FERNÁNDEZ-GALARZA, E. and POSTIGO-SÁNCHEZ, I. (2016). "La igualdad de género en los grados de comunicación: análisis normativo y propuestas para su obligatoria inclusión en los planes de estudio universitarios andaluces". *Comunicación, Cultura y Cooperación*, AE-IC, 2328-2342.

- FLEGO, L. and ORTEGA, J. (2020). "Mujeres en el trabajo: persistencia de los condicionantes de género en el ámbito laboral". *Cuhso*, 30 (2), 160-188.
<<https://doi.org/10.7770/cuhso-v30n2-art1856>>
- GIDEON, L. (2012). *Handbook of Survey Methodology for the Social Sciences*. Berlin: Springer.
- GÓMEZ-COLELL, E.; MEDINA-BRAVO, P.; FERNÁNDEZ-ABALLÍ, A.; JIMÉNEZ-MORALES, M. and OBRADORS, M. (2016). "El Grado de Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas: Cuestión de Género". *Opción*, 32 (11), 668-676.
- GUTIÉRREZ-GARCÍA, E. and RECALDE, M. (2018). "Dibujando al profesional del mañana: estudio Delphi sobre capacidades de la comunicación estratégica en España". *Anàlisi. Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 59, 139-156.
<<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3153>>
- HERNÁNDEZ, R. (2010). "Ejecutivos de cuentas: una figura que necesita evolucionar". *Anuncios*, 151, 10-11.
- HERNÁNDEZ RUIZ, A.; MARTÍN LLAGUNO, M. and BELÉNDEZ VÁZQUEZ, M. (2008). *La mujer en las agencias de publicidad. Categorías, especializaciones y conflicto trabajo-familia en las agencias españolas*. Asociación española de Agencias de Publicidad (AEAP).
- IGARTUA-PEROSANZ, J. J. (2006). *Métodos cuantitativos de investigación en comunicación*. Barcelona: Bosch.
- INFOADEX (2020). *Estudio InfoAdex de la inversión publicitaria en España 2020*. Madrid: InfoAdex.
- JIMÉNEZ-MARÍN, G.; SIMANCAS-GONZÁLEZ, E. and GONZÁLEZ-OÑATE, C. (2022) (Eds.). *La publicidad. Estructura de la industria en España. Del cliente a la agencia (y viceversa)*. Madrid: Pirámide.
- KLEIN, D. (2000). *Women in advertising. 10 years on*. London: IPA
- KRIPPENDORFF, K. (2004). *Content analysis*. Thousand Oaks: Sage.
- LINSTONE, H. A. and TUROFF, M. (2002). *The delphi method*. Reading: Addison-Wesley.
- LÓPEZ-NAVAJAS, A. (2015). *Las mujeres que nos faltan. Análisis de la ausencia de las mujeres en los manuales escolares*. [Doctoral dissertation]. Universitat de València.
- MALLIA, K. L. (2009). "Rare Birds: Why So Few Women Become Ad Agency Creative Directors". *Advertising & Society Review*, 10 (3).
- MARTÍN, M. (2007). *La mujer en las agencias de publicidad. Políticas de conciliación de la vida familiar y laboral en torno al techo de cristal*. AEAP.
- MARTÍN-LLAGUNO, M. and NAVARRO-BELTRÁ, M. (2015). "La segregación vertical y horizontal en las agencias de publicidad antes y después de la Ley de Igualdad entre hombres y mujeres". *Reis: Revista Española de Investigaciones Sociológicas*, 150, 113-150.
<<http://doi.org/10.5477/cis/reis.150.113>>
- MARTÍNEZ OLMO, F. (2002). *El cuestionario: un instrumento para la investigación en las ciencias sociales*. Barcelona: Laertes.
- MATILLA, K.; CUENCA-FONTBONA, J. and COMPTE-PUJOL, M. (2018). "Un análisis de las asignaturas sobre Comunicación y Relaciones Públicas en los másters universitarios españoles tipo MBA (curso 2016-2017)". *adComunica. Revista Científica de Estrategias, Tendencias e Innovación en Comunicación*, 16, 221-240.
<<https://doi.org/10.6035/2174-0992.2018.16.12>>

- MELGAR, C. (2019, July 16). "Publicidad con nombre de mujer". *Vogue*. Retrieved from <<https://business.vogue.es/lideres/articulos/mujeres-publicidad-talento-creativo/70>>.
- MONTES, C. and ROCA, D. (2016). "El liderazgo femenino en la creatividad publicitaria". *Cuadernos.info*, 39, 113-131.
<<http://doi.org/10.7764/cdi.39.1039>>
- NIXON, S. (2003). *Advertising cultures: gender, commerce, creativity*. London: Sage Publications.
- OCAÑA, S. and LUQUE, M. (2007). "Mujeres en publicidad: protagonistas en la empresa y el Mensaje". *Anuncios*, 119, 24-25.
- PALOMO-DOMÍNGUEZ, I. (2022). "La estructura de la agencia de publicidad". In: JIMÉNEZ-MARÍN, G.; SIMANCAS-GONZÁLEZ, E. and GONZÁLEZ-OÑATE, C. (2022) (ed.). *La publicidad. Estructura de la industria en España. Del cliente a la agencia (y viceversa)*. Madrid: Pirámide.
- POOL, J. (2001). "Quiet never gets you anywhere". *Advertising Age*, 72, 23.
- SÁNCHEZ-MORENO, M. M. (2019). "Análisis de los perfiles profesionales en las webs de las agencias de publicidad en España". *adComunica. Revista Científica de Estrategias, Tendencias e Innovación en Comunicación*, 18, 87-100.
<<http://dx.doi.org/10.6035/2174-0992.2019.18.6>>
- SANZ-MARCOS, P.; JIMÉNEZ-MARÍN, G. and GONZÁLEZ-OÑATE, C. (2021). "La competencia creativa entre el alumnado de los grados en Publicidad y Relaciones Públicas en España y su adecuación a las demandas del sector profesional". *Icono 14*, 19 (2), 66-92.
<<https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v19i2.1604>>
- SIMANCAS-GONZÁLEZ, E. (2019). "La formación feminista como arma para combatir la publicidad sexista". *Hachetetepe. Revista Científica de Educación y Comunicación*, 18, 51-60.
<<https://doi.org/10.25267/Hachetetepe.2019.v1.i18.6>>
- SILVERMAN, D. (2016). *Qualitative research*. London: Sage Publication.
- YIN, R. (1989). *Case study research. Design and methods, applied social research methods series*. London: Sage.

The scope of crowdfunding in responsible university relations

Ana Ibáñez-Hernández
Carmen Carreton-Ballester
Javier Esclapés
Maria José Rodríguez-Jaume

University of Alicante

ana.ibanez@ua.es

mc.carreton@ua.es

javier.esclapes@ua.es

mj.rodriguez@ua.es



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: December 2022

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: IBÁÑEZ-HERNÁNDEZ, A.; CARRETON-BALLESTER, C.; ESCLAPÉS, J. y RODRÍGUEZ-JAUME, M. J. (2022). «The scope of crowdfunding in responsible university relations». *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 105-124. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3557>>

Abstract

This paper describes the first decade of crowdfunding (CF) experiences carried out in the Spanish university environment from the perspective of social responsibility and determines the impact of their campaigns in solving social problems. To do so, the literature, from traditional patronage practices to current models of micro crowdfunding in the digital environment, allow framing crowdfunding by putting the focus on the relationship of universities with their audiences and the agents involved in the campaigns they launch from 2012 to the present, as part of their purposes with society. To achieve the objectives, a content analysis of the 56 CF campaigns, launched by a dozen Spanish public universities, was carried out. The study concludes that the fluctuations in the evolution and development of university crowdfunding (UCF) and the scarce existence of their own platforms have not yet allowed its consolidation as a tool of their University Social Responsibility (USR). In addition, UCF campaigns in Spain place value on research at the service of society, moving away from philanthropy to exercise social responsibility, although they are generally focused on their internal audiences, so their social impact is limited.

Keywords: crowdfunding; social impact; public relations; university social responsibility; university crowdfunding

Resum. *Abast del microfinançament en les relacions universitàries responsables*

Aquest article descriu la primera dècada d'experiències de microfinançament realitzades a l'entorn universitari espanyol des de la perspectiva de la responsabilitat social i determina l'impacte de les seves campanyes en la resolució de problemes socials. Per fer-ho, la literatura, des de les pràctiques tradicionals de mecenatge fins als models actuals de microfinançament en l'entorn digital, permet emmarcar el microfinançament centrant-se en la relació de les universitats amb els seus públics i els agents implicats en les campanyes que engeguen des de 2012 fins a l'actualitat com a part dels seus propòsits amb la societat. Per assolir els objectius, s'ha fet una anàlisi de contingut de les 56 campanyes de microfinançament posades en marxa per una desena d'universitats públiques espanyoles. L'estudi conclou que les fluctuacions en l'evolució i el desenvolupament del microfinançament universitari i l'escassa existència de plataformes pròpies no han permès encara la seva consolidació com a eina de la seva responsabilitat social universitària. A més, les campanyes de microfinançament universitari a Espanya valoren la recerca al servei de la societat i s'allunyen de la filantropia per exercir la responsabilitat social, tot i que generalment se centren en els seus públics interns, per la qual cosa el seu impacte social és limitat.

Paraules clau: microfinançament; impacte social; relacions públiques; responsabilitat social universitària; microfinançament universitari

Resumen. *Alcance de la microfinanciación en las relaciones universitarias responsables*

Este artículo describe la primera década de experiencias de microfinanciación llevadas a cabo en el entorno universitario español desde la perspectiva de la responsabilidad social y determina el impacto de sus campañas en la solución de problemas sociales. Para ello, la literatura, desde las prácticas tradicionales de mecenazgo hasta los modelos actuales de microfinanciación en el entorno digital, permite enmarcar la microfinanciación centrándose en la relación de las universidades con sus audiencias y los agentes implicados en las campañas que lanzan desde 2012 hasta el presente como parte de sus propósitos con la sociedad. Para alcanzar los objetivos se llevó a cabo un análisis de contenido de las 56 campañas de microfinanciación puestas en marcha por una decena de universidades públicas españolas. El estudio concluye que los vaivenes en la evolución y el desarrollo de la microfinanciación universitaria y la escasa existencia de plataformas propias no han permitido aún su consolidación como herramienta de su responsabilidad social universitaria. Además, las campañas de microfinanciación universitaria en España ponen en valor la investigación al servicio de la sociedad y se alejan de la filantropía para ejercer la responsabilidad social, aunque generalmente están enfocadas a sus públicos internos, por lo que su impacto social es limitado.

Palabras clave: microfinanciación; impacto social; relaciones públicas; responsabilidad social universitaria; microfinanciación universitaria

1. Introduction

Against a social context of limited resources and of social needs not being addressed due to a shortfall of public funds, public universities, as institutions focused on generating and disseminating knowledge, have historically relied on alternative funding mechanisms. Ever since the Roman nobleman Gaius Cilnius Maecenas served as patron to the creative talents of authors

such as Horace and Virgil, models of philanthropic patronage of artistic creation and social progress have evolved down to the present day.

In this digital era, new forms of collective online funding have arisen, allowing funds to be raised to cover the cost of social projects which could otherwise not be undertaken. Crowdfunding is capable of reaching and extending audiences, facilitating active participation by the agents involved in the cause to be sponsored.

Spanish universities are no strangers to this phenomenon, and draw on university crowdfunding (UCF) to fund research projects, to support job opportunities for their students, or to work to establish socially responsible relationships.

2. Theoretical framework

2.1. From patronage to crowdfunding in social responsibility

Patronage is a “public or private activity intended to facilitate and promote certain initiatives of general social interest” (Martín-Fernández, 1996: 27). Originating in the Roman era, patronage proliferated in the sphere of the arts (Corredoira, 1991, as cited in Felipe-Morales et al., 2018), with a long historical tradition down to the modern era (Solano-Santos, 2009: 65) which remains valid to this day.

Within the business sphere, and from the relational perspective, we find patronage at the start of the 20th century, when the public relations specialist Ivy Lee succeeded in changing public perceptions in the USA by humanising the business dealings of the magnate Rockefeller.

Ever since Weil (1992) defined patronage as “the institutional act best demonstrating the new legitimacy of business” (p. 103), and following contributions debated in the scientific literature (Parés i Maicas, 1991, 1994; Serret-Gras, 1994; Palencia-Lefler, 2007), patronage as a tool of public relations has sought to improve the relationship between an organisation and its audiences. Through patronage, companies give back a part of their profits to society, make good damage caused, or improve the environment. These factors bring patronage into closer alignment with the concept of social responsibility (Palencia-Lefler, 2007; Wilcox, Cameron and Xifra, 2012) as a technique for community relations (Xifra, 2007).

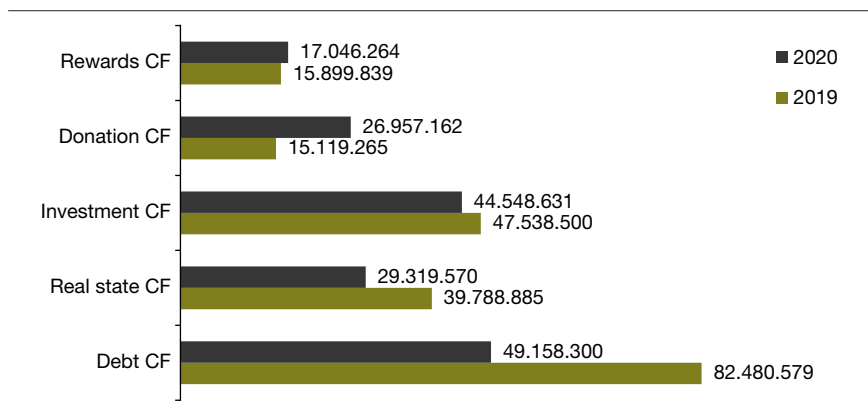
Crowdfunding has emerged from the digital sphere, increasing the interaction among the different agents involved in the process of funding (Liakopoulou, 2020: 32). The concept of crowdfunding is derived from the term crowdsourcing, coined by Jeff Howe in 2006 to identify a collective form of production without any kind of formal organisation (Caccuri, 2014: 1).

While collaborative work forms the basis of crowdsourcing, crowdfunding is characterised by the pursuit of collective funding for a particular project, normally online. This has resulted in the evolution of “fundraising strategies focused on specific projects through the creation of virtual collectives

capable of obtaining the economic resources required for their development” (Sajardo and Pérez, 2018: 2). Crowdfunding came about “as an effective tool in forming collectives grouped around specific purposes, and helping to assemble the corresponding resources” (Sajardo and Pérez, 2018: 2). Kraus et al. (2016: 15) established four typical methods of crowdfunding, depending on the consideration received: donations, rewards, debt and equity.

The most recent *Universo Crowdfunding* report (González and Ramos, 2020), identifies 59 active crowdfunding platforms in Spain: general interest (28); businesses and start-ups (33); artistic and cultural (20); social (12); sports (3); gastronomy (1) and science & health (7).¹

Graph 1. Evolution of fundraising by type of crowdfunding (CF) in Spain (€)



Source: Produced by the authors on the basis of the 2020 Annual Report on Crowdfunding in Spain. The Year of the Great Challenge.

The report indicates that both investment CF and debt CF remain the leading forms of raising funds. However, the pandemic had a direct impact on debt, real estate and investment CF, which registered a substantial decline compared with donation and reward CF, which grew in 2020 (Graph 1).

The interest of this research is in models with a social purpose or those taking place in exchange for intangible reward (Kraus et al., 2016: 15), and which furthermore correspond to the types of crowdfunding which saw an increase in fundraising in 2020. To begin with, donations CF would be equivalent to traditional charity fundraising, where the investors receive social recognition. Meanwhile, reward CF projects are based on a transaction in exchange for symbolic monetary compensation or recognition, and are more likely to succeed than any other form of crowdfunding (Belleflamme, Lambert and Schwienbacher, 2013).

If patronage is an activity linked to the sphere of PR, it would seem logical to assert that micro-patronage is too (Felipe-Morales et al., 2018: 5). Crowd-

1. <<https://www.universocrowdfunding.com/principales-plataformas-crowdfunding/>>.

funding is thus the natural evolution of traditional patronage. However, while the concept of patronage is linked to the idea of a patron and philanthropic action in the business sphere, social responsibility, as indicated by Sajardo and Pérez (2018: 2) speaks to “a paradigm shift which has gone beyond merely technological and community aspects, extending to the social and participatory sphere”, suggesting that technological advances allow the proliferation of online communities and virtual representations of audiences on new platforms where individuals with shared interests can communicate and organise to collaborate and play an active social role in addressing a particular issue.

Because new technologies not only allow online payments, but also change the way we connect and relate to one another, they are shaping a global, hyperconnected society which needs an appropriate communication strategy to achieve the support required to fund a project.

2.2. University social responsibility (USR) and university crowdfunding (UCF)

The university world has historically been linked to philanthropy, with a commitment to expand knowledge through education. Since the Renaissance, in fact, many of the most prestigious universities have emerged with the support of funding from religious or financial groups (Fontaine, 2012).

Article 41.1 of Spain's Universities Act 6/2001, of 21 December 2001, establishes that “Universities shall conduct research of excellence with the aims of contributing to the advancement of knowledge, innovation and improvements to the quality of life of citizens, and the competitiveness of businesses”. For her part, Domínguez-Pachón (2009) argues that the main aims of universities achieve impacts which are different from those generated by businesses: “human and professional training (academic purpose) and the construction of new knowledge (research purpose)” (p. 37).

University teaching and research staff obtain funding from different public authorities to undertake their research projects. However, within a context of budgetary constraint and reduced allocation of public funding, we also see recourse to private funding.

At the level of fundraising strategy development, then, this may mark the difference between university quality and excellence (Carpio and Pérez-Esparrells, 2020; Villanueva, 2020). Those Spanish public universities that devise a favourable institutional framework for fundraising will obtain greater social rewards and financial returns in the long term, will generate greater philanthropic funds, achieve more support from the university community, and will be more highly rated by stakeholders and society (Pérez-Esparrells and De la Torre, 2016).

Although within the business sphere the concept of social responsibility is widespread, it is a relatively new addition in the university world. Socio-economic changes and budget cuts facilitated its emergence at universities (Torres-Valdés, 2011), “incorporating terms such as co-responsibility, social responsibility, fundraising and others within their administration” (p. 186). Donors

become actors and audiences with whom to establish a strategic and relational dialogue based on excellence, through symmetrical two-way communication.

Within the context of USR, however, universities move away from philanthropic practices to perform their substantive functions (Tommasino and Cano, 2016) via social responsibility intended to favour the social and economic development of their host society, through their capacity “to disseminate and implement a set of general and specific principles and values” (Jiménez, 2002: 96), such as education, research, reflection, innovation and a critical spirit. They act through “professional expertise and the building of knowledge” (Vallaes and Álvarez, 2019: 110) “for the effective transformation of society towards the resolution of problems of exclusion, inequality and sustainability” (Vallaes, 2006: 5)

The phenomenon of UCF first emerged in 2012 at the University of Utah. The initiative used the RocketHub platform, with more than 210 donors raising \$32,000 (Martín-López et al., 2020), coinciding with the earliest UCF initiatives at the University of Valencia.

In 2018, the study by Colasanti, Frondizi and Meneguzzo concluded that successful UCF means engaging stakeholders in university crowdfunding projects and an effective communication strategy to foster a sense of institutional belonging.

In Spain, research into a flute adapted to be played with just one hand (UCF campaign) determined that the commitment to responsible research demands greater social permeability and open dialogue with all parties involved in the process, thereby achieving active participation in resolving the problems raised in the research. Its success lies in genuine integration, empowering an engaged audience and driving forward the micro-funded project (Esclapés, Gómez and Ibañez, 2021).

3. Objectives

Within this context, the research aims are to:

1. Analyse UCF campaigns by Spanish universities, and ascertain the role played in such processes by philanthropy vs social responsibility.
2. Ascertain whether research has a presence in the UCF campaigns of Spanish universities.
3. Define the profile of beneficiary populations affected by the UCF campaigns of Spanish universities.
4. Ascertain whether committed agents participate in the UCF campaigns of Spanish universities.

4. Methodology

Within the theoretical framework developed, and in accordance with the aims set, the decision was taken to conduct a pilot study using quantitative

and qualitative content analysis of CFU campaigns of Spanish universities, which will allow the data to be studied and its subsequently interpreted.

All CFU campaigns (56) are analysed based on data from the digital portal Universo Crowdfunding,² as this is considered the platform with “the largest collection of data on crowdfunding in Spain”, from the beginning of its activity until the date of the study (February 2022). The variable analysis (Table 1) was conducted in January and February 2022, using the statistical program SPSS v.22.

Table 1. Variables analysed

V1. Year launched	
V2. University	
V3. Campaign name	
V4. Platform name	
V5. Platform type ^[1]	1. Internal; 2. External.
V6. Partner entities	1. None; 2. In partnership with private businesses; 3. In partnership with other public bodies; 4. In partnership with public and private organisations; 5. In partnership with agents committed to the impact of the campaign.
V7. Type of CF campaign ^[2]	1. Donations; 2. Rewards; 3. Debt; 4. Equity; 5. Partnerships.
V8. CF campaign concept ^[3] (USR)	1. Solidarity with the vulnerable (philanthropy); 2. Management of social and environmental impacts (technical definition of SR); 3. Participation in expectations of stakeholders (highlighting the importance of dialogue among the parties involved, and democratic processes of recognition and consensual decision-making); 4. Participation by the university in developing policies (extension and outreach; social responsibility goal; social transformation towards greater justice and sustainability); 5. Excellence (focused on the quality of the performance of the organisation responsible, its capacity to set the standard for others).
V9. Beneficiary populations	1. University students (internal); 2. University teaching and research staff (internal); 3. Vulnerable/specific social groups (external); 4. Other.
V10. Research	1. Highlights and publicises research with social impact; 2. Does NOT highlight and publicise research with social impact.
V11. Fundraising target	1. Achieves the minimum required; 2. Exceeds the minimum; 3. Does not achieve the minimum; 4. Exceeds the optimum; 5. Does not exceed the optimum; 6. No limit established.
V12. Scope and subject (post-coding)	1. Technology and science research; 2. Entrepreneurship and employment; 3. Advances in medicine and health; 4. Social innovation; 5. Community support and solidarity; 6. Education; 7. Local and rural development; 8. Gender; 9. Archaeology and paleontology; 10. Architecture; 11. Plastic and scenic arts; 12. History; 13. Environment and sustainability; 14. Journalism.

Source: Author's own.

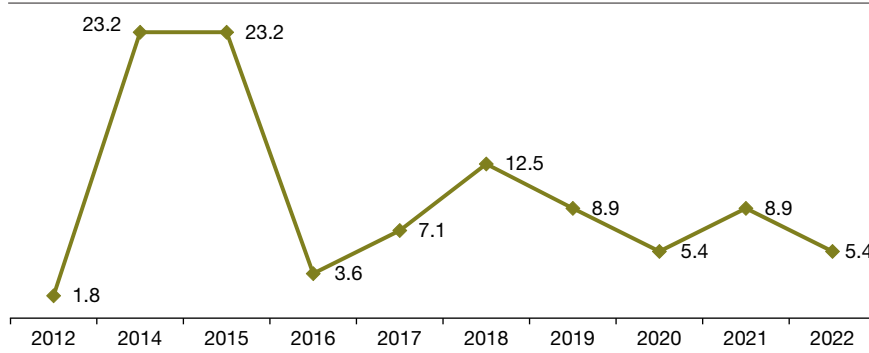
2. *El potencial del Crowdfunding para las Universidades* [The potential of Crowdfunding for Universities] on the digital portal Universo Crowdfunding. This study used the most recent report available at the time, from 2020. <<https://www.universocrowdfunding.com/?s=universidades>>.

This pilot study will serve to test the research process, identify the variables of interest and decide how to measure each of them, develop or test the efficacy of the research instruments and protocols, and estimate statistical parameters for further analysis.

5. Results

In Spain, there are 11 universities that have funded various types of projects by means of crowdfunding³ since the emergence of UCF in Spain, ten years ago.

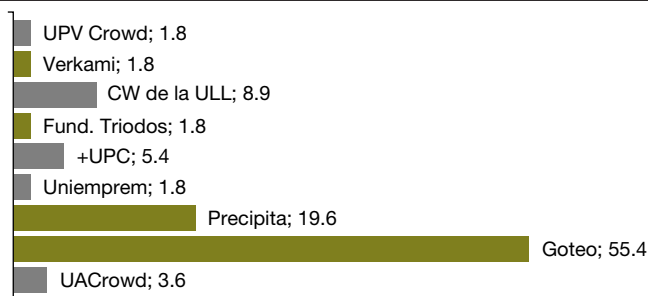
Graph 2. Chronological distribution of crowdfunding campaigns (%)



Source: Author's own.

UCF emerged in 2012, but did not take off until 2014 and 2015, a period that accounts for almost 50% of university crowdfunding campaigns. It then declined over the following two years until 2018, when there was a slight upturn (12.5%), before maintaining a downward trend over recent years (Graph 2).

Graph 3. University crowdfunding (UCF) campaigns by platform (%)



Source: Author's own.

3. <<https://www.universocrowdfunding.com/?s=universidades>>.

With regard to the platforms used, there is a considerable difference between internal and external platforms. 76.8% of campaigns are conducted using external platforms, compared with 21.4% using internal platforms. Internal platforms drive 12 campaigns, with 44 launched externally; of the latter, 5.4% are conducted via the Goteo platform (Graph 3).

In terms of partner entities, agents committed to the purpose of the campaign are involved in only 14.3% of campaigns. Partnership with public bodies can be seen in 16.1%, and campaigns promoted jointly by public bodies and private companies amount to 19.6%. However, the majority of UCF campaigns are launched by universities on their own initiative, without involving other agents (50%).

Social and environmental impact management achieves a significant presence among campaign concepts (60.7%) (Table 2). Campaigns focused on involving stakeholder expectations or engagement in social responsibility development policies account for 16.1% and 17.9% respectively. At the other end of the scale, the results reveal the lowest percentage for solidarity with vulnerable groups (5.4%). It should be emphasised that on internal platforms, the most common campaigns involve USR development policies at universities. External platforms, meanwhile, see a concentration of social and environmental impact management campaigns.

The differences found allow us to consider whether there is a relationship between the nominal variables with dichotomous values (the platform type and the different campaign concepts), to which end we calculate the *Chi-squared* (χ^2) test, the correlation coefficient of *Phi*⁴ and the Contingency coefficient (*C*) (Table 3).

Table 2. Platform type by main UCF campaign concept (cross-tabulated)

	UCF campaign concept (USR)				Total
	Solidarity with the vulnerable	Management of social and environmental impacts	Participation in stakeholder expectations	CSR development policies	
Internal platform	1	3	3	5	12
	8.3%	25.0%	25.0%	41.7%	100.0%
External platform	2	31	6	5	44
	4.5%	70.5%	13.6%	11.4%	100.0%
Total	3	34	9	10	56
	5.4%	60.7%	16.1%	17.9%	100.0%

Source: Author's own.

4. The value of *Phi* oscillates in nominal and dichotomous variables between the absolute values 0 and 1 ($0 < \phi < 1$).

Table 3. Chi-squared and symmetrical measurements between concept and type of UCF platform

Concept - Type of platform	Value of χ^2	gl	Asymptotic sig. (2 faces)	Value of Φ (ϕ)	Approx. sig. (p)	Contingency Coefficient (C)	Approx. sig. (p)
Solidarity with vulnerable groups	6.061 ^a	1	.002	.329	.014	.313	.014
Management of social and environmental impacts	9.524 ^b	1	.002	-.412	.002	.381	.002
Participation in stakeholder expectations	0.000 ^c	1	1.000	.000	1.000	.000	1.000
Development of USR policies	2.263 ^d	1	.133	.201	.133	.197	.133

a. 1 box (25.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 1.50.

b. 1 box (25.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 3.64.

c. 1 box (25.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 3.00.

d. 1 box (25.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 3.00.

Source: Authors' own.

The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant association ($\phi=.329$; $p=.014$) between solidarity with vulnerable groups, and platform type with a value $\chi^2_1=6.061$; $p=.02$. There is also a statistically significant relationship, although at a moderate-low level ($\phi=-.429$; $p=.02$) between social and environmental impact management and platform type, with a value $\chi^2_1=9.524$; $p=.02$.

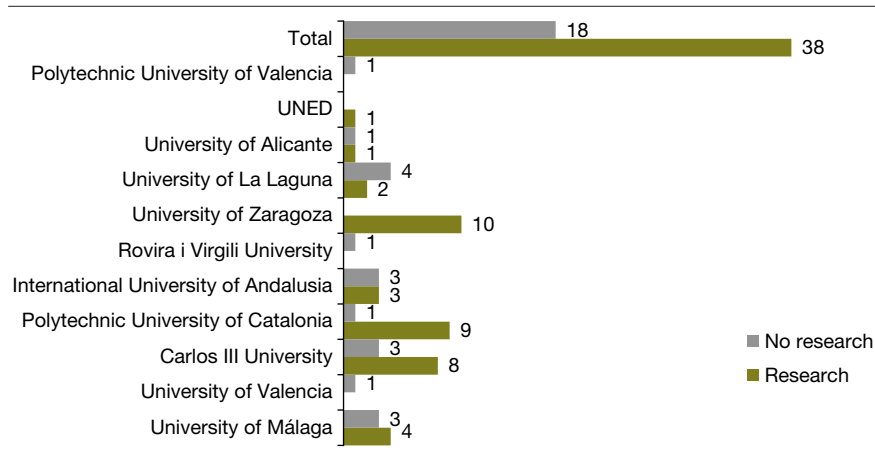
Table 4. Platform type and research function in UCF (cross-tabulated)

	Highlights and publicises research with social impact		
	Yes	No	Total
Internal platform	4	8	12
	7.1%	14.3%	21.4%
External platform	34	10	44
	60.7%	17.9%	78.6%
Total	38	18	56
	67.9%	32.1%	100.0%

Source: Authors' own.

UCF campaigns highlight their research and knowledge transfer with a social impact in 67.9% of cases, compared with 32.1% of campaigns that do not do so. Research and transfer are more present on external platforms. Furthermore, on internal platforms, campaigns that do not highlight research with a social impact dominate (Table 4).

With regard to the research present in the 67.9% of UCF campaigns, the most notable exponents are the University of Zaragoza, all of whose campaigns emphasise research, and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, with research in 90% of its campaigns. In third place, Carlos III University emphasises research in 72.7% of its UCF campaigns (Graph 4).

Graph 4. Presence of research in UCF campaigns (number)

Source: Authors' own.

The results as regards the fundraising goal achieved indicates that half of the campaigns launched on internal platforms set no limit on the funds to be raised, and 16.7% fail to raise the minimum to undertake their UCF objectives. Meanwhile, all external platforms set limits, with just 20.5% failing to reach the minimum required (Table 5).

Table 5. Platform type and UCF fundraising target (cross-tabulated)

	Fundraising target						Unknown	Total
	Achieves the minimum required	Exceeds the minimum	Does not achieve the minimum	Exceeds the optimum	Does not exceed the optimum	No limit established		
Internal platform	0	2	2	1	0	6	1	12
	0.0%	16.7%	16.7%	8.3%	0.0%	50.0%	8.3%	100.0%
External platform	9	13	9	5	8	0	0	44
	20.5%	29.5%	20.5%	11.4%	18.2%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
Total	9	15	11	6	8	6	1	56
	16.1%	26.8%	19.6%	10.7%	14.3%	10.7%	1.8%	100.0%

Source: Author's own.

The type of UCF campaign corresponds mainly to rewards (58.9%), with donations amounting to 42.9%. Collaboration follows very close behind, at 41.1%. It should be emphasised that participation through debt or equity is not represented.

In this regard, it is worth ascertaining whether the campaign types are mutually independent (H_0). To this end, a contingency analysis is conducted with a confidence level of 95%, calculating the Pearson *Chi-squared* (χ^2) test

and Cramér’s V statistic⁵ demonstrating that some campaign types are inter-related (Table 6).

Table 6. *Chi-squared* test and symmetrical Cramér’s V measurement between campaign types

	Value of χ^2	Ratio of verisimilitude	gl	Asymptotic sig. (2 faces) (p)	Value of Cramér’s V	Approx. sig. (p)
Donations and rewards	30.994 ^a	34.298	1	.000	.744	.000
Rewards and collaboration	12.668 ^b	10.980	1	.000	.476	.000

a. 0 boxes (0.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 9.86.

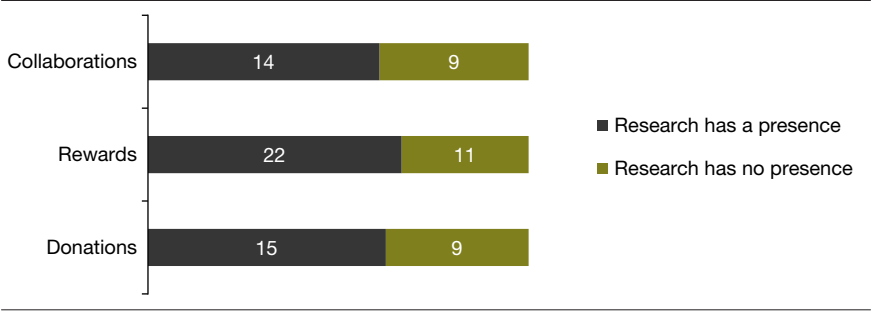
b. 0 boxes (0.0%) expected a count less than 5. The minimum count expected is 9.45.

Source: Author’s own.

The analysis shows that there is a statistically significant and strong relationship ($V=.744$; $p=.00$ between the donation and rewards campaign variables $\chi^2_{1}= 30.994$; $p= .00$, and we therefore reject the H_0 of independence. There is also a statistically significant but moderate association ($V=.476$; $p=.00$) between the rewards and collaboration campaigns, with the value $\chi^2_{1}= 12.668^b$; $p=.00$. Meanwhile, donations and collaborations are mutually independent.

In rewards campaigns, research has a presence of 67%, while it appears in 62.5% of donations campaigns. 60.1% of collaboration campaigns contain research (Graph 5).

Graph 5. Research with social impact according to type of UCF campaign (number)



Source: Author’s own.

If we start out from the H_0 of independence between the presence of research and the campaign concepts, the analysis shows that there is only a moderate relationship ($V= .294$; $p= .028$) between research and social and environmental impact management, with $\chi^2_{1}= 4.841$; $p=.028$.

5. ($0 < V < 0.2$) no association; (0.2) weak association; ($0.2 < V < 0.6$) moderate association; ($0.6 < V < 1$) strong association.

Table 7. Appearances of UCF campaign type*Research by university (cross-tabulated)

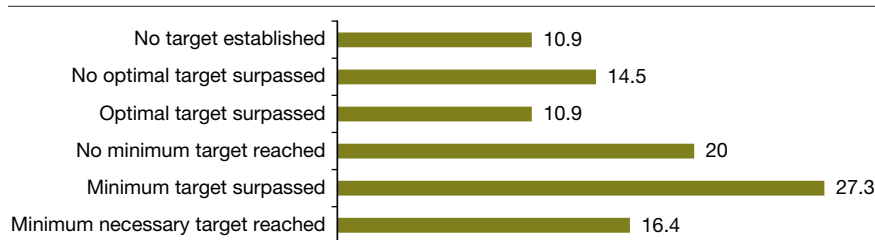
		Donations	Rewards	Collaboration
DOES highlight and publicise research with social impact	University of Malaga	0	4	1
	Carlos III University	0	6	2
	Polytechnic University of Catalonia	2	7	8
	International University of Andalusia	0	3	3
	University of Zaragoza	10	0	0
	University of La Laguna	1	1	0
	University of Alicante	1	1	0
	UNED	1	0	0
	Polytechnic University of Valencia	0	0	0
	Total	15 (39.5%)	22 (57.9%)	14 (36.8%)
Does NOT highlight and publicise research with social impact	University of Malaga	1	3	2
	University of Valencia	0	0	0
	Carlos III University	0	3	2
	Polytechnic University of Catalonia	1	0	1
	International University of Andalusia	1	2	3
	Rovira i Virgili University	0	1	1
	University of La Laguna	4	2	0
	University of Alicante	1	0	0
	UNED	1	0	0
	Total	9 (50%)	11 (61.1%)	9 (50%)
	TOTAL	24 (42.9%)	33 (58.9%)	23 (41.1%)

Source: Author's own.

Bearing in mind that rewards campaigns are the most numerous in the analysis, the multi-dimensional contingency table (Table 7) presents the distribution of UCF campaign types, and the role played by research, for each university. The most significant data are found in those campaigns that do highlight research with social impact. Particular mention should be made of the University of Zaragoza and the Polytechnic University of Catalonia, albeit with substantial differences in the types of campaign: donations at the University of Zaragoza, and donations, rewards and collaboration at the Polytechnic University of Catalonia. Meanwhile, rewards predominate among those campaigns highlighting research at the University of Malaga and Carlos III University.

Participation takes place for the benefit of university community groups (students, 20.2%, and teaching and research staff, 36.4%), and to a lesser extent, certain vulnerable social groups (7.1%). By contrast, we should highlight the large number of campaigns with unspecified beneficiaries.

As for the fundraising target (Graph 6), in spite of the different nature of the campaigns and the dispersion of results, we can evaluate the efficacy of crowdfunding campaigns. The data demonstrate that success fluctuates within minimal values; and that those that surpass the optimal target represent 14.5%, compared with 20% that do not reach the minimum target.

Graph 6. Scope of the fundraising target of UCF campaigns (%)

Source: Author's own.

While not all campaigns achieve their purposes, those that do, do not do so to the same degree. To establish their scope, we infer a qualitative scale of success based on the minimum and optimal levels achieved. Crowd campaigns that surpass the minimum, those that achieve the minimum, and those that do not surpass the optimum would correspond to *Moderate Success Level 1*; campaigns that do not surpass the optimum would correspond to *Moderate-High Success Level 2*; campaigns that surpass the optimum would be *Total Success Level 3*; and campaigns that do not attain the minimum, *No Success Level 0*.

From a qualitative analysis of the fundraising objectives, based on the themes of the campaigns that highlight research with social impact, the following should be noted:

1. The most prolific campaigns are those that focus their research with social impact on education and are quite successful in raising funds for its development. Some reach the minimum, most exceed it and some exceed the optimum amount. From the social innovation approach, there are projects for applications for education; and from the sustainability and environmental approach, sustainable prototypes are designed to reduce the ecological footprint. To a lesser extent, there are campaigns with a focus on science and technology research, with the creation of laboratories to design and develop mobile applications that respond to the needs of the social and economic environment; with a focus on gender, there are projects in education to attract female talent to technology and engineering studies and to end stereotypes and gender roles in STEM university careers; and, from the plastic and performing arts, online platforms are created for the creative cooperation of children and adolescents.
2. Campaigns on social innovation whose research has a social impact go beyond the minimum fundraising and are limited to community support issues such as the project to create a flute for students with disabilities or campaigns that, based on human rights, seek to create a free, non-profit legal service for the neediest groups of people; there are projects to eradicate child abuse, measure the impact of work over-

- load on the care of people with dementia, or support the most vulnerable students in the university community; and campaigns that seek to digitally collect the historical memory of immigrant groups. To a lesser extent, they focus on entrepreneurship and employment of young students.
3. Within those in which research is a pillar for social impact, the campaigns on science and technology research are associated with issues of social innovation, with the creation of an application for smartphones and tablets as a tool for exploration and construction of knowledge for local visitors; and in terms of local and rural development, with the construction of a system for gasification of agricultural waste biomass to generate electricity, promoting the local economy. Most of them exceed the minimum and even the optimal threshold to be developed.
 4. Community support campaigns focus on projects linked to mechanisms to alleviate the effects of the pandemic caused by COVID 19 on university students. In this case, any funds raised can be used to help the community.
 5. Among the campaigns on advances in medicine and health with social impact, they generally exceed the optimal thresholds and, to a lesser extent, manage to reach the minimums established for their development. Among them are projects on micro-technologies for the prevention of kidney disease, projects to identify and develop new compounds useful in therapy to improve the quality of life of patients with phenylketonuria and their families; projects to determine the cause of mitochondrial disease and provide adequate genetic counselling to parents and relatives, or a project that seeks a treatment for ALS, the creation of an instrument to help people with visual field loss that is easy to handle for patients, or research into dressings to repair the affected tissue with quick and definitive healing.

6. Conclusions

Depending on the targets set, we may conclude that the results serve to analyse the crowdfunding campaigns of Spanish universities, and to describe the role that philanthropy plays in them, compared with social responsibility.

In this regard, university crowdfunding (UCF) activity in Spain emerged in 2012, at the same time as the first such ventures in Utah. However, this practice has not registered constant evolution during its decade in existence, nor has it attained the expected levels of excellence for universities, thereby consolidating its role as an instrument for universities to establish responsible and sustainable links with their societal audiences.

It may likewise be seen that Spanish universities use crowdfunding campaigns to fund projects corresponding to their fundamental function. And they do so in the main with the aim of managing social and environmental impacts, highlighting the transfer of knowledge derived from their research. To a lesser

extent, campaigns are also motivated by active participation in stakeholder expectations, and the contribution in policies to develop their own social responsibility. It should nonetheless be pointed out that those campaigns deployed for the purpose of solidarity with vulnerable groups are less numerous, demonstrating that UCF is not closely aligned with philanthropic practices for implementation as a social responsibility tool vis-à-vis the community.

And as an instrument for growth in their commitment to society, although initiatives are in general developed using external platforms, there are three universities with their own crowdfunding platforms: the University of Valencia, the University of La Laguna, and the University of Alicante. However, when this study was finalised, only the University of La Laguna still had its own platform in active use.

The fundraising formula most often used in UCF is the rewards approach, followed by donations, and to a lesser extent collaboration. Although the data indicate differences between the forms of contribution, it should be borne in mind that external platforms dictate the manner in which the contributors make their contributions. In fact, donations are closely linked to rewards, and collaboration more moderately to rewards.

As for crowdfunding platforms, although *Precipita* is a public portal of the Ministry of Science and Innovation specialising in Science and Technology (Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology), the platform preferred by universities is *Goteo*. This may be because the *Precipita* model is limited to monetary donations, or because *Goteo* is a more open platform which allows a broader spectrum of contributions, including collaboration in kind, such as professional or volunteer work, actively engaging audiences, and building closer ties with the project and with the university.

The types of crowdfunding campaign thus limit the opportunities for audience collaboration, creating a distance between the universities and the agents involved in or committed to their purpose, and the target audiences of the campaign, to the detriment of relationships based on social responsibility.

Given the diversity found in terms of the fundraising target, the inferred qualitative scale allows us to assert that the great majority of projects launched can be undertaken, having surpassed their minimum expectations.

The second of the goals was to ascertain whether research has a presence in UCF campaigns. In general terms, the results indicate that universities highlight their research and the transfer of knowledge with social impact in their campaigns, using external platforms. Although the statistical analysis does not allow us to conclude that the type of platform used promotes the transfer of knowledge for the benefit of society, there is a connection between the concept of social and environmental impact management and the presence of research. In other words, research is associated with campaigns the concept of which is impact management, while no relationship is found with the other concepts.

The choice of external UCF platform is not a random factor, despite the competition from other initiatives, as the scope of coverage may be greater

than with an internal platform, making this a channel to publicise a university's research function. However, the proportion corresponding to internal groups as the beneficiary populations of the campaigns could contradict the social commitment of universities to their more immediate surroundings.

As for the third goal of the study, regarding the profile of beneficiary populations of UCF campaigns in Spain, a significant presence may be seen in terms of teaching and research staff and students, as members of the university community, indicating that the internal dimension of social responsibility is at the heart of their task, in accordance with the presence of the development of social responsibility policies, the target concept in a quarter of the campaigns. The vague presence of vulnerable groups or unspecified beneficiaries does not allow us to ascertain whether the concept of participation in stakeholder expectations focuses on groups from outside the university community, or corresponds more to internal demands.

As for establishing whether committed agents participate in UCF campaigns, it is surprising that half of the campaigns do not foster active participation by committed agents within the core of the campaign, or superficially involve other public and private entities in project micro-funding.

If we link this result to the beneficiary populations of the campaigns and the significance of USR development policies, this lends weight to the thesis that UCF campaigns are managed and developed more with regard to the internal dimension of social responsibility.

As the most recent Universo Crowdfunding annual report (2021) shows, the pandemic has not led to an increase in CF with donation and reward campaigns in the university environment (three in 2020; five in 2021 and three in 2022) versus, instead, the consolidation of the leadership of real estate crowdfunding in other sectors. In addition, the *Precipita* platform of the Spanish Foundation for Science and Technology, FECYT, closed its website two months after the end of this research.

For all of the above, the results of this study and the fulfilment of the goals set provide five important points demonstrating that UCF at Spanish universities has not succeeded in surpassing the traditional models of patronage promoted in the scientific field, or resulted in greater prominence and engagement in socially responsible relations:

- The fluctuations in the evolution and development of university crowdfunding (UCF) and the scant existence of internal platforms have so far prevented the consolidation of the practice as a tool for university social responsibility (USR).
- UCF highlights research at the service of society in fulfilment of its purposes to contribute to the advancement of knowledge, innovation and improvements in the quality of life of the general public. Specifically, campaigns in the fields of science and technology research, advances in medicine and health and education, linked to social innovation, stand out.

- UCF is not closely aligned with philanthropic purposes, and is closer to USR, while seemingly being applied more in the internal dimension of social responsibility than to external populations in the surrounding society.
- UCF serves to project initiatives between a minimum and optimal level of fundraising to guarantee their success. Most universities manage to achieve their minimum fundraising targets, and few fail to do so.
- If UCF from the outset involved committed agents, and forged alliances with other institutions or enterprises, and if platforms allowed all manner of contributions, it could achieve greater social recognition and impact with external groups, as a tool for social responsibility.

Bibliographical references

- BELLEFLAMME, P., LAMBERT, T. and SCHWIENBACHER, A. (2013). "Individual crowdfunding practices". *Venture Capital*, 15 (4), 313-333.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/13691066.2013.785151>>
- CACCURI MELHEM, D. (2014). "El crowdfunding y sus múltiples formas". *Austral Comunicación*, 3 (1), 23-31.
<<https://doi.org/10.26422/aucom.2014.0301.cacc>>
- CARPIO, M. and PÉREZ-ESPARRELLS, C. (2020). "El reto de las universidades públicas. La captación de fondos en la sociedad". *Encuentros multidisciplinares*, 64, 1-7. Retrieved from <<http://hdl.handle.net/10486/690944>>.
- COLASANTI, N., FRONDIZI, R. and MENEGUZZO, M. (2018). "Higher education and stakeholders' donations: successful civic crowdfunding in an Italian university". *Public Money & Management*, 38 (4), 281-288.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/09540962.2018.1449471>>
- DOMÍNGUEZ-PACHÓN, M-J. (2009). "Responsabilidad social universitaria". *Revista Humanismo y Trabajo Social*, 8, 37-67. Retrieved from <https://buleria.unileon.es/bitstream/handle/10612/1498/Hum8_art1.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>.
- ESCLAPÉS, J., GÓMEZ, A. and IBAÑEZ, A. (2021). "Flow. A Socially Responsible 3D Printed One-Handed Recorder". *International journal of environmental research and public health*, 18 (22), 12200.
<<https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph182212200>>
- FELIPE-MORALES, A., CALDEVILLA-DOMÍNGUEZ, D., RODRÍGUEZ-TERCEÑO, J. and DEL VALLE-MEJÍAS, M. (2018). "Crowdfunding: comunicación del mecenazgo 2.0: filantropía digital en las relaciones públicas bidireccionales". *Revista de Ciencias de la Comunicación e Información*, 23 (1), 29-41.
<[http://doi.org/10.35742/rcci.2018.23\(1\).29-41](http://doi.org/10.35742/rcci.2018.23(1).29-41)>
- FONTAINE, A. (2012). "Lucro, universidad y filantropía". *Lucro y Universidad Estudios Públicos*, 128, 157-173. Retrieved from <<https://estudiospublicos.cl/index.php/cep/article/download/296/385>>.
- GONZÁLEZ, A. and RAMOS, J. (2020). *Informe Anual sobre Financiación Participativa. (Crowdfunding) en España. El Año de la Gran Prueba*. Ed. Plataforma Universo Crowdfunding. Retrieved from <<https://www.universocrowdfunding.com/informe-anual-sobre-el-crowdfunding-en-espana-2020/>>.
- HOWE, J. (2006). "The rise of crowdsourcing". *Wired magazine*, 14 (6), 1-4. Retrieved from <https://www.wired.com/wired/archive/14.06/crowds_pr.html>.

- JIMÉNEZ, M. (2002). “¿Cómo observar la responsabilidad social de las universidades?: De los valores a los indicadores”. In: *Universidad Construye País, Memorias del seminario La Universidad construye País, La responsabilidad social de la universidad de cara al Chile de 2010*. Chile: Proyecto Universidad Construye País, 92-102.
- KRAUS, S., RICHTER, C., BREM, A., CHENG, C. F. and CHANG, M. L. (2016). “Strategies for reward-based crowdfunding campaigns”. *Journal of Innovation & Knowledge*, 1 (1), 13-23.
- LEY ORGÁNICA 6/2001, de 21 de diciembre, de Universidades. Retrieved from <<https://www.boe.es/buscar/pdf/2001/BOE-A-2001-24515-consolidado.pdf>>.
- LIAKOPOULOU, I. (2020). “Crowdfunding platforms in US and EU: empirical analysis of social capital”. *Megatrend Review*, 17 (2), 31-44. <<https://doi.org/10.5937/MegRev2002031L>>
- MARTÍN-FERNÁNDEZ (1996). *Régimen tributario del mecenazgo en España*. Madrid: Ed. La ley-Actualidad.
- MARTÍN-LÓPEZ, S., SÁNCHEZ-ESPADA, J., BEL-DURÁN, P. and LEJARRIAGA-PÉREZ DE LAS VACAS, G. (2020). “¿Son las plataformas de crowdfunding una opción que deban impulsar las universidades para sus emprendedores?”. In: *XVIII Congreso Internacional de Investigadores en Economía Social y Cooperativa La Economía Social: herramienta para el fomento del desarrollo sostenible y la reducción de las desigualdades*. Retrieved from <<http://ciriec.es/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/COMUN-077-T1-MARTIN-SANCHEZ-et-al-ok.pdf>>.
- PALENCIA-LEFLER ORS, M. (2007). “Donación, mecenazgo y patrocinio como técnicas de relaciones públicas al servicio de la responsabilidad social corporativa”. *Anàlisi*, 35, 153-170.
- PARÉS I MAICAS, M. (1991). *Mecenatge, Patrocini i Comunicació*. Barcelona: PPU. Colección Comunicación y Relaciones.
- (1994). *La nueva filantropía y la comunicación social: mecenazgo, fundación y patrocinio*. Barcelona: PPU. Colección Comunicación y Relaciones Públicas.
- PÉREZ-ESPARRELLS, C. and DE LA TORRE, E. (2016). “La filantropía y el fundraising en las universidades públicas españolas como estrategia de sostenibilidad futura: ¿algo está cambiando?”. *Investigaciones en Economía de la Educación*, 11, 173-186. Retrieved from <<http://hdl.handle.net/10486/677253>>.
- SAJARDO MORENO, A. and PÉREZ SEMPERE, S. (2018). “Análisis de las plataformas de crowdfunding social en el estado español: un estudio de casos”. *Revista de Estudios Cooperativos (REVESCO)*, 130, 149-175. <<https://doi.org/10.5209/REVE.61938>>
- SERRET-GRAS, M. (1994). “Patrocinio y Mecenazgo”. In: BARQUERO CABRERA, D. (Coord.). *Manual de Relaciones Públicas Empresariales*. Barcelona: Ediciones Gestión 2000 S.A., 459-474.
- SOLANO-SANTOS, L. F. (2009). “Relaciones públicas: patrocinio y mecenazgo”. *Revista de Comunicación Vivat Academia*, 109, 66-73. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.15178/va.2009.109.63-76>>
- TOMMASINO, H. and CANO, A. (2016). “Avances y retrocesos de la extensión crítica en la Universidad de la República de Uruguay”. *Revista Masquedós*, 1 (1), 9-23.
- TORRES-VALDÉS, R. M. (2011). “Relaciones públicas y fundraising en las universidades: una propuesta de modelo de gestión”. *Pensar la Publicidad*, 5 (1), 183-202. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5209/rev_PEPU.2011.v5.n1.36929>
- VALLAEYS, F. (2006). *Breve marco teórico de la responsabilidad social universitaria*. CD Multimedia, Lima, Perú: Banco Interamericano de Desarrollo.

- VALLAEYS, F. and ÁLVAREZ-RODRÍGUEZ, J. (2019). “Hacia una definición latinoamericana de responsabilidad social universitaria. Aproximación a las preferencias conceptuales de los universitarios”. *Educación XXI*, 22 (1), 93-116.
<<https://doi.org/10.5944/educXXI.19442>>
- VILLANUEVA, J. S. (2019). “La captación de fondos vía mecenazgo y patrocinio en las universidades públicas española”. *La Cuestión Universitaria*, 10, 81-95.
- WEIL, P. (1992). *La comunicación global*. Barcelona: Editorial Paidós Comunicación.
- WILCOX, D.; CAMERON, G. T. and XIFRA, J. (2012). *Relaciones Públicas. Estrategias y tácticas*. Madrid: Pearson Educación S.A.
- XIFRA, J. (2007). *Técnicas de las Relaciones Públicas*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC.

The current role of influencers in public relations: Comparing Spain and the USA

Carmen Máiz-Bar
Javier Abuín-Penas

Universidade de Vigo. School of Social Sciences and Communication
maizbar@uvigo.es
jabuin@uvigo.es



Submission date: June 2022
Accepted date: December 2022
Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: MÁIZ-BAR, C. and ABUÍN-PENAS, J. (2022). The current role of influencers in public relations: Comparing Spain and the USA. *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 125-144. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3554>>

Abstract

Influencers currently play a key role in corporate communications. Their presence is increasing in promotional activities, initiated both by private companies and public institutions, which has transformed them into particularly important figures over the past decade. But what is their specific role in public relations? Are they also part of PR campaigns? Are they considered a useful tool? This paper intends to provide answers to these questions, first by reviewing the academic literature in order to gather information about the current position of influencers within PR campaigns; and next, by analyzing two surveys completed by professionals in the USA and Spain, in order to understand the situation in both countries and to compare them with one another, so as to give a more complete picture of the current scenario. The bibliometric review shows that academia is studying the figure of the influencer, both from a general and a public relations point of view, acknowledging its importance in strategic communication today. Furthermore, the results of the questionnaires reveal that PR companies are actively hiring influencers; that they are considered a good complement to their other tools; and that these partnerships are delivering good results for their clients. Although incorporating them involves challenges, practitioners are improving their managing processes and believe that such collaborations will continue in the future.

Keywords: public relations, influencers, social media, communication strategies, Spain, USA

Resum. *El paper actual dels influencers en les relacions públiques: comparació entre Espanya i EUA*

Els *influencers* exerceixen actualment un paper fonamental en la comunicació corporativa. La seva presència és cada vegada més gran en activitats de promoció, iniciades tant per

empreses privades com per institucions públiques, la qual cosa els ha convertit en figures especialment rellevants en l'última dècada. Però, quin és el seu paper específic en les relacions públiques? Formen part de les seves campanyes? Es consideren una eina útil? Aquest article pretén donar resposta a aquestes preguntes revisant, en els primers apartats, literatura acadèmica per recaptar informació sobre la posició actual dels *influencers* en les campanyes de relacions públiques; en la segona part s'analitzen dues enquestes, cobertes per professionals als Estats Units i a Espanya, amb la finalitat de conèixer la situació en tots dos països i comparar-la per oferir una imatge més completa de l'escenari actual. La revisió bibliomètrica mostra que l'entorn acadèmic està estudiant aquesta figura, tant des d'un punt de vista general com des del de les relacions públiques, i que la seva importància es reflecteix avui dia en la comunicació estratègica. A més, els resultats dels qüestionaris proven que les empreses de relacions públiques estan col·laborant activament amb *influencers*, que els consideren un bon complement per a les seves altres eines, i que aquesta associació ofereix bons resultats als seus clients. Encara que la seva incorporació suposa un repte, els professionals estan millorant els processos de gestió i consideren que les col·laboracions continuaran en el futur.

Paraules clau: relacions públiques; *influencers*; xarxes socials; estratègies de comunicació; Espanya; EUA

Resumen. *El papel actual de los influencers en las relaciones públicas: comparación entre España y EE. UU.*

Los *influencers* desempeñan actualmente un papel fundamental en la comunicación corporativa. Su presencia es cada vez mayor en actividades de promoción, iniciadas tanto por empresas privadas como por instituciones públicas, lo que los ha convertido en figuras especialmente relevantes en la última década. Pero ¿cuál es su papel específico en las relaciones públicas? ¿Forman parte de sus campañas? ¿Se consideran una herramienta útil? Este artículo pretende dar respuesta a estas preguntas revisando, en sus primeros apartados, literatura académica para recabar información sobre la posición actual de los *influencers* en las campañas de relaciones públicas; en la segunda parte se analizarán dos encuestas, cubiertas por profesionales en Estados Unidos y en España, con el fin de conocer la situación en ambos países y compararla para ofrecer una imagen más completa del escenario actual. La revisión bibliométrica muestra que el entorno académico está estudiando esta figura, tanto desde un punto de vista general como desde el de las relaciones públicas, y que su importancia se refleja hoy en día en la comunicación estratégica. Además, los resultados de los cuestionarios prueban que las empresas de relaciones públicas están colaborando activamente con *influencers*, que los consideran un buen complemento para sus otras herramientas, y que esta asociación está ofreciendo buenos resultados a sus clientes. Aunque su incorporación supone un reto, los profesionales están mejorando los procesos de gestión y consideran que las colaboraciones continuarán en el futuro.

Palabras clave: relaciones públicas; *influencers*; redes sociales; estrategias de comunicación; España; EE. UU.

1. Introduction

When people are asked about influencers, in most cases what comes to mind is either a young girl trying out outfits that a trendy retail brand has delivered to her door or a young boy testing a videogame that a popular gaming com-

pany has given him for free – both of them in front of a camera, presenting their experiences via a well-known social media platform. But what happens when communications professionals are asked the same question? What is their take on who influencers are, and on what they do? And do they believe that their activities can be included in their clients' campaigns? Taking all this into consideration, the authors of this paper were particularly interested in the perspective of public relations (PR) professionals, as the discipline of PR is not traditionally considered the primary environment for collaborations with influencers.

This paper intends to provide answers to the questions above, attempting to describe the actual role of influencers in PR activities, and to find out whether PR practitioners are currently using their services and consider them useful tools to achieve their communication goals. For this purpose, first academic literature is reviewed, to define the figure of the influencer and to find out from a scientific point of view whether influencers are being embraced by the discipline of PR. Sources of information include a selection of the main scientific databases (Google Scholar, Academia, Researchgate, Dialnet, Web of Science, Springer, Elsevier, Scopus), using search criteria relating to the topic keywords and timeframes. Next, the results of two surveys of public relations professionals in Spain and the USA are analyzed, to understand the business perspective regarding this trend in those two countries. These surveys are also compared, to provide a more comprehensive overview of the current global scenario.

The main objectives of this paper are therefore:

- Objective 1 (O1): To describe the role that academia currently assigns to influencers in PR activities.
- Objective 2 (O2): To understand the perspective of PR professionals in Spain regarding influencers in their field.
- Objective 3 (O3): To understand the perspective of PR professionals in the USA regarding influencers in their field.
- Objective 4 (O4): To compare both perspectives, in order to find congruences and differences, and to build an overall picture of the current situation of influencers in PR.

2. Literature Review

2.1. *Influencer who?*

Traditionally, the decision-making process, when applied to consumer behavior, has been studied from either a problem-solving or a need-solving perspective. As such, it has been divided into five stages: problem/need recognition; search; alternative evaluation; purchase decision; and outcomes/evaluation (García Soria, 2015). Also traditionally, those five stages took place in the offline world. However, the rise of the internet has progressively shifted

most of this process to the online environment, particularly the three central stages (Darley, Blankson and Luethge, 2010).

In order to tip the scales in that decision-making process, brands have often turned to experts and celebrities to foster positive responses towards their products or services. This task is usually assigned to individuals who have the ability to influence the purchases or actions of other individuals, through their opinions, assessments or recommendations, or through their own purchases or actions (Marín, Serrano and Galiano, 2020). The process is reflected in works by authors such as Katz and Lazarsfeld (1966), who argued that there is a two-step flow of communication in the unfolding of media content influence, mediated through personal networks and their communication systems, and including opinion leaders; that is, people who interpret and deliver information that guides others. Those opinion leaders have also been defined as “individuals who exert an unequal amount of influence on the decision of others” (Rogers and Cartano, 1962: 435). In fact, it has been asserted that admired personalities tend to increase the credibility of messages, boost brand awareness, raise recall percentages, improve the perception of the organization responsible for the products or ideas and, ultimately, drive up purchases and adherences to causes (Castelló and Del Pino, 2015).

The figure of today’s social media influencer has its roots in these offline brand endorsers, experts or celebrities who link their image to specific products or services with the objective of making them stand out as attractive to the public. The increasing prevalence of the internet and social media has moved these figures, together with the above-mentioned decision-making process, from the offline world to the digital environment, where their influence is amplified and they are officially assigned the name “influencers” (Vilajoana-Alejandre, Rom-Rodríguez and Miotto, 2019).

Enke and Borchers (2019) define these influencers as “third-party actors who have established a significant number of relevant relationships with a specific quality to and influence on organizational stakeholders through content production, content distribution, interaction, and personal appearance on the social web” (p. 267). Freberg et al. (2011) argue that they are “a new type of independent third party endorser who shapes audience attitudes” (p. 90). IAB Spain (2022) completes and updates the definition by adding that influencers have the potential to create engagement, boost conversations and affect purchasing decisions.

According to these definitions, in this new, social-media-related environment, the traditional brand-prescribing model is nowadays linked to a person who generates content but also to a community which receives this content, interacts with it and makes decisions based on it. This, to some scholars, is closely related to the concept of word of mouth, which also exists in the offline world and is focused on personal communications about products or services through channels not directly controlled by the company (Kotler et al., 2002, in Bakker, 2018: 80). Word of mouth has evolved into a digital process and, unlike the traditional version, one that “can be either a free form

of communication or paid, modern word-of-mouth in the internet age involves brand owners who engage people who have a large followership on social media platforms to speak – for payment – on their brand's behalf" (Bakker, 2018: 80). Linking both concepts, influencers are the crucial figures in influencer marketing, which is also called e-word-of-mouth and is defined as the practice of compensating individuals for posting about a product or service on social media (Campbell and Rapp Farrell, 2020).

2.2. Influencer who, in public relations?

Social media are currently crucial for public relations. Just like in other communication disciplines, they have become one of its main tools, as they are one of the information and leisure sources preferred by audiences: in 2021, people all over the world spent on average 2 hours and 27 minutes on social media every day (We Are Social and Hootsuite, 2022). Extensive studies included in several international monitors have in fact proved their increasing importance in the communication environment (Moreno et al., 2017; Zerfass et al., 2016). Moreover, as Booth and Matic (2011) note, "while the fundamentals of public relations are essentially the same as social media relations, the addition of this new marketing channel allows practitioners to engage with influencers one on one" (p. 190).

Furthermore, influencers, as figures who are currently key in social media, have proved to be valuable tools in PR campaigns. According to Borchers and Enke (2021), their participation increases brand awareness, creates product reviews, generates publicity, quickly spreads information and creates believable and authentic content. Besides, influencers, when chosen correctly, tend to know the organization's stakeholders well, as they are part of their online communities. In addition, according to Villena (2018), they can identify which part of those audiences has a greater degree of influence on other consumers.

From a public relations perspective, it is also interesting that influencers are currently acting as gatekeepers, given their central role in deciding about information flows, and are becoming both senders of and channels for messages (Navarro et al., 2020). In fact, Herzig, Mass and Roitman (2014) argue that they are able to "disseminate interesting content, ideas or opinions to others, hoping to stimulate some intended reactions by potential readers, e.g., be endorsed, followed, cited, or even trigger an active discussion" (p. 46), which applies to commercial environments but also to other fields such as political communication. Probably for this reason, many PR professionals believe that using influencers can in some cases be more effective nowadays than standard advertising and traditional press releases, as many consumers now trust and/or actually listen to the latter less than to influencer-created content (Tworzydło, Zyczynski and Wadja, 2019).

Nevertheless, of course, it should also be noted that the implementation of the influencer figure in public relations campaigns is a relatively new trend. Therefore, managing their correct incorporation into communication strate-

gies can be challenging for PR companies. As Wolf and Archer (2018) state, “the dynamics of influencer engagement present major challenges to even the most experienced PR professionals, due to the rapid rise of individual influencers, changing business models, and only slowly evolving best practice approaches to the evaluation of influencer engagement” (p. 502). These new challenges involve supervising (and working in a beneficial way with) people who can share, send, copy, extract or comment on content relating to recommendations to large communities (Navarro et al., 2020). Furthermore, PR companies are continuously trying to find effective metrics to determine who are the most influential players, how far conventional metrics apply to new media, and what tools are lacking for measuring influencers in relation to PR activities (Gillin, 2008). Despite all these factors, public relations professionals seem to be up for that challenge, as they see “a potential in using influencers in activities associated with communication” (Tworzydło et al., 2019: 146), and consider it a growing trend to which the discipline should adapt, and which it should even try to embrace.

As proof of this, studies such as those by Charest, Bouffard and Zajmovic (2016), Tworzydło et al. (2019), and Davies and Hobbs (2020) show that many public relations managers and practitioners are already incorporating influencers into their activities on a regular basis. Although for some of them it is still not a common practice, the goals of reaching new potential audiences, and ones that they are not usually able to approach through other channels, and contributing to better results in terms of two-way communication, are great incentives to make influencers part of general communication strategies. Difficulties certainly arise, which are frequently found in the planning and monitoring stages, given that working methods differ from the traditional media’s methods, but nevertheless, the results of the above-mentioned studies show that PR companies are improving influencer integration processes, with highly positive results.

3. Methods

In order to achieve this paper’s objectives, surveys were chosen as the main research method, following a quantitative approach. Two different questionnaires were used to reach our two main target groups:

- Survey A (Spain), in Spanish. Created using the software Qualtrics (<<https://www.qualtrics.com/>>), and addressed to public relations professionals in Spain.
- Survey B (USA), in English. Created using the software Google Forms (<<https://www.google.com/forms/about/>>), and addressed to public relations professionals in the United States of America.

The surveys were distributed via email during the month of March 2022. Recipients were top public relations agencies in both countries, chosen from

rankings and lists published by ADC (2022), Comunicare (n.d.), El Publicista (2020) and Top Comunicación (2022) for Spain; and Business2Community (2022), Influencer Marketing Hub (2022), Observer (2022), PRvoke Media (2021), for the USA. The calculations to verify the validity and representativeness of the survey samples were made using the recommendations of the Harvard University Program on Survey Research, specifically, their sample size calculator, included in Creative Research Systems (Creative Research Systems, n.d.). A confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 10 were introduced.

Survey A (Spain) met the statistical criteria for the representativeness of the sample: 125 companies were included in the sources above and therefore, using Creative Research Systems calculations, the sample size needed was 55. The questionnaire was filled out by 63 companies.

Survey B (USA) also met the statistical criteria for the representativeness of the sample: 101 companies were included in the sources above and therefore, using Creative Research Systems calculations, the sample size needed was 49. The questionnaire was filled out by 49 companies.

The structure of the two surveys was very similar, including questions about the respondents' work with influencers in 2021 (and previous years, if any), their reasons for working/not working with influencers, business sectors, results, and thoughts about the future, both in their personal collaboration with influencers and in the industry in general. Answers were collected and analyzed using the Qualtrics and Google Forms data, analysis, results and report tools.

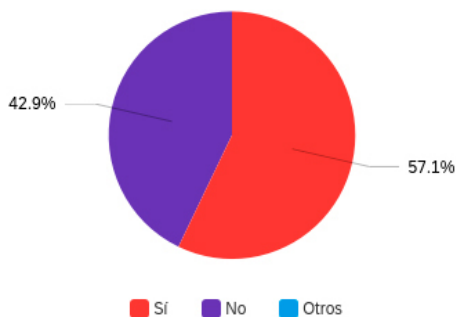
4. Results

4.1. *Work with influencers in 2021*

The first question was "Has your company worked with influencers in 2021?".

In Survey A (Spain), 57.1% of respondents stated that they had worked with influencers during the year 2021, while 42.9% indicated that they had not.

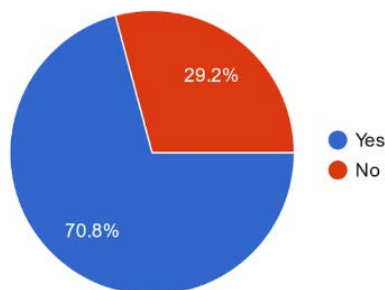
Figure 1. Work with Influencers in 2021 - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), 70.8% of respondents stated that they had worked with influencers during the year 2021, while 29.2% indicated that they had not.

Figure 2. Work with Influencers in 2021 - USA

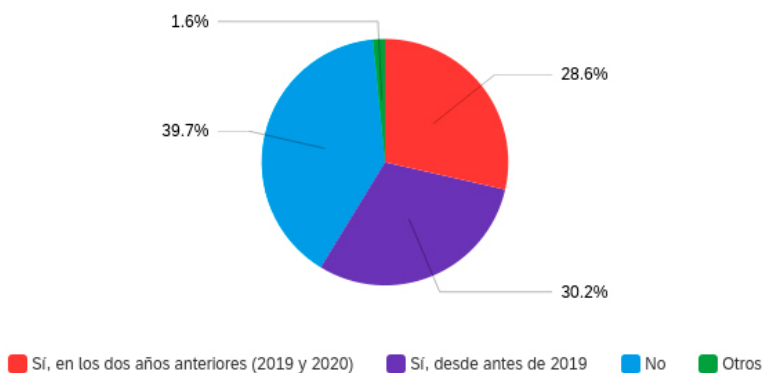


Source: Authors' own.

4.2. Work with influencers before 2021

When asked if their company had previously worked with influencers, in Survey A (Spain), 30.2% of respondents said that they had indeed used their services since before 2019, 28.6% chose the option “yes, in the 2 previous years (2019 and 2020)” and 39.7% said that they had not worked with influencers before that year. The 1.6% who chose “other” explained their answer in the text field, and in all cases they wrote that they had worked with influencers since before 2019, therefore the real percentage for the answer “yes, since before 2019” is 31.8%.

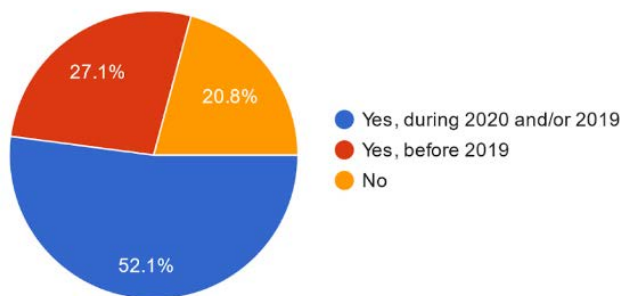
Figure 3. Work with Influencers before 2021 - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), when asked if their company had previously worked with influencers, 27.1% of respondents indicated that they had actually used their services since before 2019, 52.1% chose the option “yes, in the 2 previous years (2019 and 2020)” and 20.8% said that they had not worked with influencers before that year. None of the respondents chose the option “other”.

Figure 4. Work with Influencers in 2021 - USA



Source: Authors' own.

4.3. Reasons for not working with influencers

In the next section, those PR professionals who had stated that they had not worked with influencers were asked to briefly explain their reasons.

In Survey A (Spain), many different responses were received. These included financial reasons, not finding influencers that were appropriate for their client or sector, not finding their services necessary, preference for other communication tools, and not believing that they are good professionals.

In Survey B (USA), responses were also varied, ranging from financial reasons to not knowing enough about the sector, and including not considering the industries or the specific clients a good match. A smaller percentage of respondents believed that influencers were not honest/profitable, and therefore would never hire them.

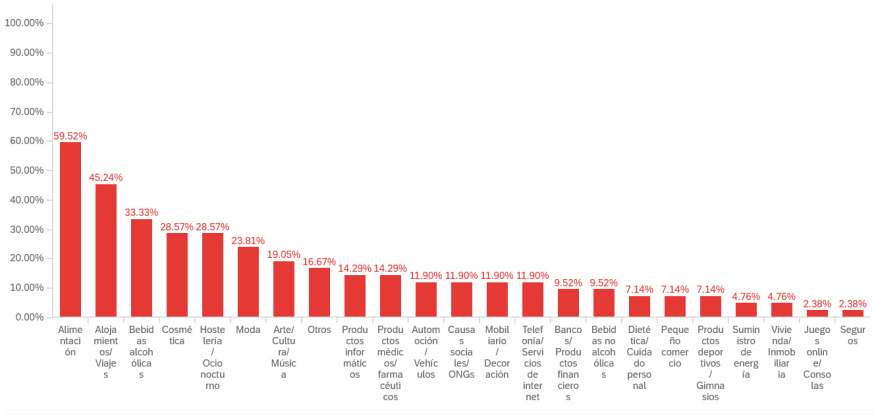
4.4. Sectors

The next question, addressed to those PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers, referred to the business sectors where they had used their services.

In Survey A (Spain), the highest percentage was achieved by the category “food” (59.52%), followed by “lodging/travel” (45.24%), “alcoholic beverages” (33.33%), “beauty” (28.57%), “hospitality/nightlife” (28.57%), “fashion” (23.81%), “arts/culture/music” (19.05%), “other” (16.67%), “technology/IT” and “healthcare/pharmaceutical products” (both with 14.29%); and

“automotive”, “non-profit”, “furniture/decoration” and “mobile/internet services” (all of these with 11.90%). The remaining sectors reached percentages below 10%.

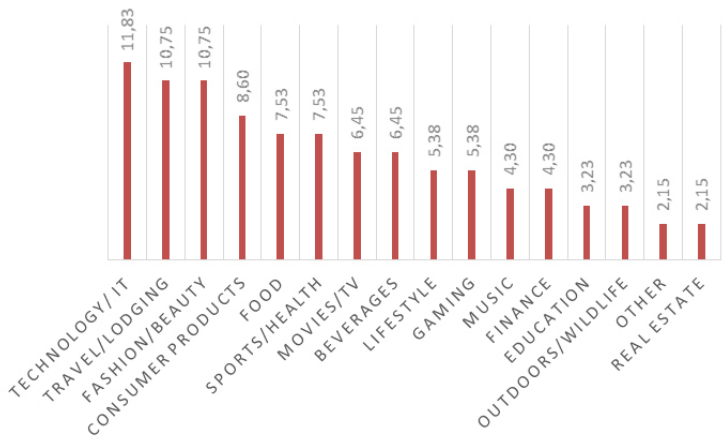
Figure 5. Sectors Working with Influencers - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), the highest percentage was achieved by the category “technology/IT” (11.83%), followed by “lodging/travel” and “fashion/beauty” (both with 10.75%), “consumer products” (8.60%), “food” and “fitness/health” (both with 7.63%), “movies/TV” and “beverages” (both with 6.45%), and “lifestyle” and “gaming” (both with 5.38%). The remaining sectors reached percentages below 5%.

Figure 6. Sectors Working with Influencers - USA



Source: Authors' own.

4.5. Assessment of results

The following question, addressed to those PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers, asked whether the results of the communication activities involving them had been positive.

In Survey A (Spain), 43.9% of the respondents stated that they had always had positive results, while 56.1% indicated that had happened in some cases. None of the respondents chose the option “no, never”.

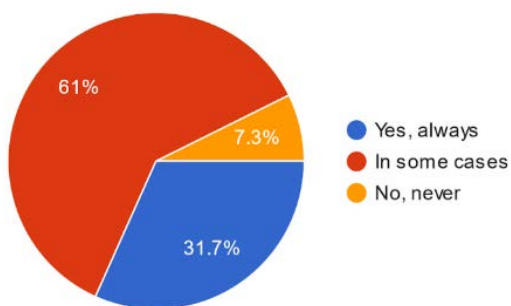
Figure 7. Assessment of Results - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), 31.7% of respondents stated that they had always had positive results, while 61% indicated that had happened in some cases. 7.3% of respondents chose the option “no, never”.

Figure 8. Assessment of Results - USA



Source: Authors' own.

4.6. Explanation of assessment of results

In the next section, those PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers were asked to briefly explain their previous response.

In Survey A (Spain), those who had obtained positive results listed more traffic to businesses websites, reaching wider audiences, raising brand awareness, growth of social media communities, and an increase in consumer loyalty. Those respondents who had obtained positive results only in some cases stated that not all influencers behaved professionally, that it was hard to measure real conversion rates, not choosing the right influencer for their client, or not getting good price/results ratios. Respondents who said they had never obtained positive results indicated that the influencers that they had hired did not meet the contract agreements, displayed a lack of professionalism and/or charged high prices.

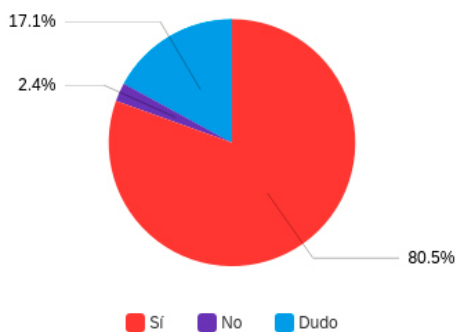
In Survey B (USA), those who had obtained positive results listed working only with influencers who can guarantee results, more traffic to e-commerce websites, greater audience engagement, raising brand awareness, attracting customers, an improvement in social media impressions and reach, and broader visibility for other actions (i.e. press releases). Those respondents who had obtained positive results only in some cases stated that it was hard to track results, some partnerships not being a great fit, not meeting initial expectations, or influencers often not following directions. Respondents who had never obtained positive results indicated that they believed that influencers are overrated, that most of the contents that they posted did not generate any interest, or did not drive actual sales.

4.7. *The future*

The next question, addressed to those PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers, concerned whether they thought that they would use the services of influencers again in the future.

In Survey A (Spain), 80.5% of the respondents stated that they would, 2.4% indicated that they would not, and 17.1% said that they were not sure.

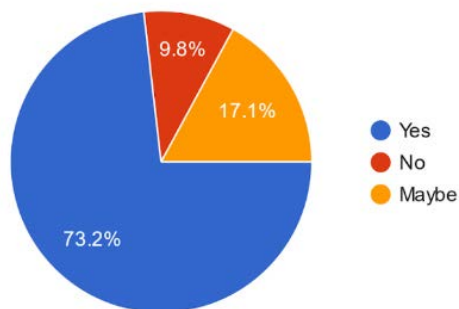
Figure 9. Use of Influencers in the Future - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), 73.2% of the respondents stated that they would, 9.8% indicated that they would not, and 17.1% said that they were not sure.

Figure 10. Use of Influencers in the Future - USA



Source: Authors' own.

4.8. Explanation of future assessment

The next question, addressed to those PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers, asked them to briefly explain their previous response.

In Survey A (Spain), those who believed that they would use influencers in the future wrote that they reached new, different profiles, that maintaining a stable relationship with them was beneficial, it was a great way to promote products, it was the right complement to other communication activities, it had provided good results in previous experiences, that good influencers yielded profits, or that choosing the right influencer always brought positive results. Those respondents who had chosen “maybe” in the previous question stated that they would use influencers in the future depending on the campaign, the contract, the influencer and the target audience; they also indicated that before using them again, the agreements should be clearer, and the actions better monitored. Respondents who did not believe that they would use influencers in the future provided responses similar to those for the two questions above: not cost-effective, lack of trust, and too much work for too little profit.

In Survey B (USA), those who believed that they would use influencers in the future wrote that they found them useful for increasing social media followers, that they were a top strategy for driving traffic to websites and ecommerce, that they constituted a valuable and relatively inexpensive asset, that consumers found influencers relatable and tended to purchase items that they promoted, or that it rounded out communication strategies, reaching a different demographic as compared to other tools. Those respondents who had chosen “maybe” in the previous question wondered whether choosing

the right influencers was really possible, whether other tools were more useful, whether they would soon be replaced by other tools, and whether the costs were actually worth the trouble. Respondents who did not believe that they would use influencers in the future provided responses similar to those for the two questions above: that they believed that influencers were overrated and not profitable; some added a few undermining words about their personalities.

4.9. *Influencers beneficial for PR*

The next question, addressed to both the PR professionals who had stated that they had worked with influencers and those who had stated that they had not worked with influencers, asked whether they thought that they are beneficial for PR activities.

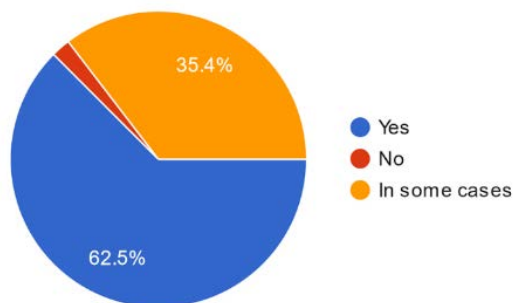
In Survey A (Spain), 53.7% responded affirmatively, while 42.6% chose the option “In some cases”. 3.7% did not think that using influencers is beneficial for PR activities.

Figure 11. Influencers beneficial for PR - Spain



Source: Authors' own.

In Survey B (USA), 62.5% responded affirmatively, while 35.4% chose the option “In some cases”. 2.1% did not think that using influencers was beneficial for PR activities.

Figure 12. Influencers beneficial for PR - USA

Source: Authors' own.

4.10. Explanation of assessment of benefits

Finally, both those PR professionals who said they had worked with influencers and those who said they had not were asked to briefly explain their previous response.

In Survey A (Spain), those who believed that they would use influencers in the future wrote that, with an adequate strategy, they were a powerful tool and were key stakeholders who should always be taken into account; that they brought greater media coverage and contributed to brand growth; that they complemented other PR activities, reaching niche target audiences; or that in their opinion public relations were in fact reborn (in the eyes of society in general) thanks to the influencer trend. Those respondents who had chosen “maybe” in the previous question stated that it depended on the industry, the product and the target audience; they also believed that leaving the reputation of a company in the hands of an external person was dangerous; or that knowing the way influencers operated, they could be very useful as a tool, but inexperienced PR practitioners could be easily fooled. Respondents who did not believe that they would use influencers in the future provided the following responses: they considered themselves non-believers, did not trust them, or thought they were too focused on younger audiences, which were never among their target audiences.

In Survey B (USA), those who believed that they would use influencers in the future wrote that they helped to direct customers to businesses, reaching new target audiences and bringing their own followers, particularly the younger ones; that they rounded out the PR tool chest, as they were another outlet for messages; that, with more and more people turning to social media for information, influencers were an important part of the communications mix; that they played a role in further expanding awareness, generating momentum and attracting people’s attention; or that they could lead to increased PR coverage and credibility. Those respondents who had chosen “maybe” in the previous question wondered whether influencers were not

just a new version of traditional spokespersons, and understood that they were only useful for specific types of industries and particular audiences. Respondents who did not believe that they would use influencers in the future provided responses similar to those for the two questions above, as most of them believed that influencers were overrated; some added that they “suspect that they have free reign and may not adhere to company values/guidelines”.

5. Discussion and conclusions

This paper was aimed at defining the role of influencers in public relations, focusing on finding out whether they are currently part of PR campaigns, and are considered a useful tool by academia and practitioners.

Objective 1 (O1) specifically sought to describe the role that academia currently assigns to influencers in PR activities. The literature review included relevant documents covering the emergence and evolution of the figure of the influencer, and key texts regarding their inclusion in the discipline of public relations, both on a theoretical and a practical level. This confirmed that influencers are today often part of PR campaigns, and that they are considered valuable tools, given, among other reasons, their contributions to brand awareness and engagement, their role as information gatekeepers, or the fact that they complement other communication activities and serve as a means to reach specific and/or niche target audiences. Of course, incorporating this new figure involves challenges, but the literature proves that public relations companies are improving influencer integration processes, with highly positive results.

The second objective (O2) aimed to understand the perspective of PR professionals in Spain regarding influencers in their field. The results of Survey A (Spain) showed that more than half of public relations practitioners in Spain currently use their services, and have been doing so for some time now. Over 50% of them stated that they had always achieved positive results, and although some of them said that they would preferably use them only in specific situations, none of the respondents had consistently had negative results. Probably for this reason, 80% of respondents stated that they would use influencer services again in the future, arguing that they can reach new, different target audiences, yielding benefits and becoming a great complement to other communication activities. Regarding the specific benefits of using influencers for PR activities, more than half of the respondents thought that they were a powerful tool, provided that they were framed within an adequate strategy, as they brought greater media coverage and contributed to brand growth. While several respondents were hesitant when answering these last questions, their explanations mostly included concerns about campaign/target audience/brand suitability, monitoring issues and cost.

The third objective (O3) was focused on understanding the perspective of PR professionals in the USA regarding influencers in their field. The results of Survey B (USA) revealed that most of the public relations practitioners cur-

rently include influencers in their communication activities, and that they have been doing so for several years. Although one third of the respondents stated that they had always had positive results when using their services, most of the respondents indicated that this had happened only in some cases, and some of them had only had negative experiences. Nevertheless, almost 75% of them were ready to give the tool a second chance, as they confirmed that they would use influencer services again in the future, indicating that they are a top strategy for broadening social communities, driving traffic to websites, and reaching targeted audiences, and that they are a relatively inexpensive tool. With regard to the benefits for PR activities, many respondents mentioned that they rounded out communication tool chests, as they are a new channel to send out messages and provide new audiences – particularly younger ones – and that they lead to increased coverage credibility and awareness. Most of the hesitant respondents indicated that trusting them was an issue, as they did not believe that they would respond to instructions and/or bring benefits.

The fourth, and final objective (O4) addressed the comparison of the perspectives of both countries, trying to find common grounds and differences. As seen above, many of the responses about the reasons for using influencers, their intentions regarding the future and the benefits they bring to PR activities were similar for both countries. The majority of the respondents in Spain and the USA provided positive feedback, which reflected good previous experiences and predicted a good public relations-influencer relationship in the future. The reasons for the positive feedback and forecast were also very similar, therefore the main differences were found in some of the percentages obtained for the “yes/no” questions and the business sectors where influencers are currently used. As for the percentages, the results show that more American (70.2%) than Spanish (57.1%) companies currently employ the services of influencers; and that in Spain (56.1%) more firms have had only positive results than in the USA (32.5%), where some of them had never achieved good outcomes (7.5%). Consequently, the percentages for those American PR practitioners who had decided not to use influencers in the future, or who believed that they were beneficial for PR activities, were slightly higher than in Spain, although they stayed below 10% in all cases. Finally, the business sectors where influencers were hired differed between both countries, with the highest figures obtained for technology in the USA and for food in Spain; travel, fashion and beauty came next in both cases, although the ranking order was also slightly different.

This research was limited in its focus to two countries, and to the PR practitioners who could be reached by the authors during a limited period of time; for these reasons, the respondents could not be fully representative of global public relations professionals. Furthermore, not all the literature that was consulted for this project could be included, due to restrictions in length. Nonetheless, the results of this paper provide valuable insights regarding the current role of influencers in PR activities, both from an academic and an industry point of view. It has been proved that influencers today actively par-

ticipate in public relations campaigns; that their reputation among agencies is positive, given that they contribute to brand awareness and growth; and that a long term relationship with them is foreseen. Moreover, although all this involves challenges, as the figure of the influencer has not traditionally been part of the public relations toolset and including influencers introduces new players with different working systems, PR companies can see the benefits of this new partnership and are definitively ready to accept the challenge.

Bibliographical references

- ADC – ASOCIACIÓN DE CONSULTORAS DE COMUNICACIÓN (2022). *Socios*. Retrieved from <<https://www.asociacionadc.org/socios/>>.
- BAKKER, D. (2018). “Conceptualizing Influencer Marketing”. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Marketing and Management*, 1 (1/18), 79-87.
- BOOTH, N. and MATIC, J. A. (2011). “Mapping and leveraging influencers in social media to shape corporate brand perceptions”. *Corporate Communications: An International Journal*, 16 (3), 184-191.
<<https://doi.org/10.1108/13563281111156853>>
- BORCHERS, N. S. and ENKE, N. (2021). “Managing strategic influencer communication: A systematic overview on emerging planning, organization, and controlling routines”. *Public Relations Review*, 47 (3), 47.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2021.102041>>
- BUSINESS2COMMUNITY (2022). *Best PR Agencies and Firms for 2022*. Retrieved from <<https://www.business2community.com/agencies/best-pr-agencies>>.
- CAMPBELL, C. and RAPP FARRELL, J. (2020). “More than meets the eye: The functional components underlying influencer marketing”. *Business Horizons*, 63 (4), 469-479.
- CASTELLÓ MARTÍNEZ, A. and DEL PINO ROMERO, C. (2015). “La comunicación publicitaria con Influencers”. *Redmarka: Revista de Marketing Aplicado*, 1 (14), 21-50.
<<https://doi.org/10.17979/redma.2015.01.014.4880>>
- CHAREST, F., BOUFFARD J. and ZAJMOVIC, E. (2016). “Public relations and social media: Deliberate or creative strategic planning”. *Public Relations Review*, 42 (4), 530-538.
- COMUNICARE (n.d.). *Agencias relaciones públicas*. Retrieved from <<https://www.comunicare.es/agencias-relaciones-publicas/>>.
- CREATIVE RESEARCH SYSTEMS (n.d.). *Sample Size Calculator*. Retrieved from <<https://surveysystem.com/sscalc.htm>>.
- DARLEY, W., BLANKSON, C. and LUETHGE, D. (2010). “Toward an Integrated Framework for Online Consumer Behavior and Decision Making Process: A Review”. *Psychology and Marketing*, 27, 94-116.
- DAVIES, C. and HOBBS, M. (2020). “Irresistible possibilities: Examining the uses and consequences of social media influencers for contemporary public relations”. *Public Relations Review*, 46 (5).
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2020.101983>>
- EL PUBLICISTA (2020). *Ranking de las mejores agencias de RRPP en España*. Retrieved from <<https://www.elpublicista.es/reportajes/ranking-mejores-agencias-rrpp-espana-2020>>.

- ENKE, N. and BORCHERS, N. S. (2019). "Social media influencers in strategic communication: A conceptual framework of strategic social media influencer communication". *International Journal of Strategic Communication*, 13, 261-277.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/1553118X.2019.1620234>>
- FREBERG, K., GRAHAM, K., MCGAUGHEY, K. and FREBERG, L. A. (2011). "Who are the social media influencers? A study of public perceptions of personality". *Public Relations Review*, 37 (1), 90-92.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.11.001>>
- GARCÍA SORIA, J. (2015). *Bases conceptuales y empíricas del nuevo consumidor digital: Influencia de internet en el proceso de compra de teléfonos inteligentes*. Phd Dissertation. Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid.
- GILLIN, P. (2008). "New Media, New Influencers and Implications for the Public Relations Profession". *Journal of New Communications Research*, 2 (2), 1-10.
- HERZIG, J., MASS, Y. and ROITMAN, H. (2014). An author-reader influence model for detecting topic-based influencers in social media. *September Proceedings of the 25th ACM Conference on Hypertext and Social Media*, 46-55.
- IAB SPAIN (2022). *Libro Blanco Marketing de Influencia*. Retrieved from <<https://iabspain.es/estudio/libro-blanco-marketing-de-influencia-version-actualizada-2022/>>.
- INFLUENCER MARKETING HUB (2022). *Top PR Agencies You Should Absolutely Check Out*. Retrieved from <<https://influencermarketinghub.com/top-pr-agencies/>>.
- KATZ, E. and LAZARSFELD, P. F. (1966). *Personal influence: The part played by people in the flow of mass communications* ([3rd print.]). Foundations of communications research: Vol. 2. New York: The Free Press.
- MARÍN DUEÑAS, P. P., SERRANO DOMÍNGUEZ, C. and GALIANO CORONIL, A. (2020). "El influencer marketing y el proceso de compra en los estudiantes universitarios". In: S. LIBERAL ORMAECHEA and L. MAÑAS VINIEGRA (Eds.). *Las redes sociales como herramienta de comunicación persuasiva*. Madrid: McGraw-Hill, 91-106.
- MORENO, A., MOLLEDA, J. C., ATHAYDES, A., SUÁREZ, A. M., HERRERA, M. and ÁLVAREZ, A. (2017). *Latin American Communication Monitor 2016 – 2017. Tendencias en comunicación estratégica: big data, automatización, engagement, influencers, coaching y competencias. Resultados de una encuesta en 17 países*. Madrid: EUPRERA/DIRCOM.a.
- NAVARRO, C., MORENO, A., MOLLEDA, J., KHALIL, N. and VERHOEVEN, P. (2020). "The challenge of new gatekeepers for public relations. A comparative analysis of the role of social media influencers for European and Latin American professionals". *Public Relations Review*.
- OBSERVER (2022). *The Best PR Firms in America 2022*. Retrieved from <<https://observer.com/list/best-pr-agencies-in-america/>>.
- PROVOKE MEDIA (2021). *Top 10 Global PR Agency Ranking 2021*. Retrieved from <<https://www.provokemedia.com/ranking-and-data/global-pr-agency-rankings/2021-pr-agency-rankings/top-10>>.
- ROGERS, E. M. and CARTANO, D. G. (1962). "Methods of measuring opinion leadership". *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 26 (2), 435-441.
- TOP COMUNICACIÓN (2022). *Mapa de las multinacionales de RR.PP. en España*. Retrieved from <<https://www.topcomunicacion.com/mapa-de-las-multinacionales-de-relaciones-publicas-rrpp-comunicacion-en-espana/>>.

- TWORZYDŁO, D., ZYCZYNSKI, N. and WADJA, M. (2019). "Influencers as Support for Public Relations Campaigns". *Marketing of Scientific and Research Organizations*, 31, 131-150.
<<https://doi.org/10.2478/minib-2019-0016>>
- VILAJOANA-ALEJANDRE, S., ROM-RODRÍGUEZ, J. and MIOTTO, G. (2019). "Retos de la autorregulación publicitaria ante los riesgos jurídicos y éticos del marketing de influencers". *Revista Mediterránea de Comunicación*, 10 (2), 115-129.
- VILLENA, E. (2018). "El influencer de moda como sujeto de relaciones públicas: recursos y herramientas". *Redmarka: Revista Académica de Marketing Aplicado*, 22, 115-128.
<<https://doi.org/10.17979/redma.2018.01.022.4938>>
- WE ARE SOCIAL and HOOTSUITE (2022). *Digital 2022 Global Overview Report*. Retrieved from <<https://wearesocial.com/us/blog/2022/01/digital-2022-another-year-of-bumper-growth-2/>>.
- WOLF, K. and ARCHER, C. (2018). "Public relations at the crossroads: The need to reclaim core public relations competencies in digital communication". *Journal of Communication Management*, 22 (4), 494-509.
- ZERFASS, A., VERHOEVEN, P., MORENO, A., TENCH, R. and VERČIČ, D. (2016). *European Communication Monitor 2016. Exploring trends in big data, stakeholder engagement and strategic communication. Results of a survey in 43 Countries*. Brussels: EACD/EUPRERA, Quadriga Media Berlin.

“We have an Ondas Award and a lot of anxiety”: Engagement strategies and parasociality of the *Estirando el chicle* podcast*

Lucía Caro Castaño
Lourdes Gallardo Hurtado

Universidad de Cádiz

lucia.caro@uca.es

lourdes.gallardo@uca.es



Submission date: June 2022

Accepted date: December 2022

Published in: January 2023

Recommended citation: CARO CASTAÑO, L. and GALLARDO HURTADO, L. (2022). “We have an Ondas Award and a lot of anxiety”: Engagement strategies and parasociality of the *Estirando el chicle* podcast. *Anàlisi: Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura*, 67, 145-165. DOI: <<https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/analisi.3570>>

Abstract

The *Estirando el chicle* [Stretching the chewing gum] audiovisual podcast is analyzed as a success story that focuses on the connection between the program and its social audiences to determine whether elements of parasociality exist. The case study method is used, with a mixed design that combines discourse analysis and content analysis to understand: 1) the discursive strategies used by the creators, searching for a co-orientation effect with their audience, and 2) whether fandom expresses the existence of parasociality on YouTube. The results show that the hosts use five strategies to be perceived as authentic and to connect with their audience: self-revelation, the “behind-the-scenes” narrative subgenre, visibility of mental health issues, rejection of the aspirational discourse of influencers, and the simulation of interaction. As regards signs of parasociality among the fandom, it is found that 63.8% of comments address the hosts with familiarity, 14.4% of the texts express affectivity belonging to the primary group, and the gratifications from the podcast obtained are entertainment (46.5%), the sense of belonging to the community (18.9%), self-expression (11%), identification (4.7%), and an improvement in some aspect of their life (4.7%).

Keywords: PSI; PSR; public relations; podcasting; fandom; YouTube

* The authors would like to thank Mireia Jiménez, Ana Rosa Muñoz and María Cristina Tejada for their technical assistance.

Resum. «*Tenim un Ondas i molta ansietat*». *Estratègies de compromís i parasocialitat del pòdcast Estirando el chicle*

S'analitza el pòdcast audiovisual *Estirando el chicle* com a cas d'èxit parant esment en la connexió del programa amb les seves audiències socials per conèixer si existeixen elements de parasocialitat. S'empra el mètode de l'estudi de cas amb un disseny mixt que combina l'anàlisi del discurs i l'anàlisi de contingut per conèixer: 1) les estratègies discursives utilitzades per les creadores buscant un efecte de coorientació amb l'audiència i 2) si el *fandom* expressa a Youtube l'existència de parasocialitat. Els resultats mostren que les presentadores fan servir cinc estratègies per ser percebudes com a autèntiques i connectar amb les audiències: l'autorevelació, el subgènere narratiu «després de l'escena», la visibilitat de la salut mental, el rebuig al discurs aspiracional dels *influencers* i la simulació d'interacció. Quant als indicis de parasocialitat en el *fandom*, es va trobar que el 63,8% dels comentaris es dirigeix a les presentadores amb familiaritat, el 14,4% dels textos expressa una afectivitat pròpia del grup primari i les gratificacions que reconeixen obtenir del pòdcast són entreteniment (46,5%), pertinença a la comunitat (18,9%), autoexpressió (11%), identificació (4,7%) i la millora d'algun aspecte de la seva vida (4,7%).

Paraules clau: PSI; PSR; relacions públiques; podcàsting; *fandom*; YouTube

Resumen. «*Tenemos un Ondas y mucha ansiedad*». *Estrategias de compromiso y parasocialidad del pòdcast Estirando el chicle*

Se analiza el podcast audiovisual *Estirando el chicle* como caso de éxito prestando atención a la conexión del programa con sus audiencias sociales para conocer si existen elementos de parasocialidad. Se emplea el método del estudio de caso con un diseño mixto que combina el análisis del discurso y el análisis de contenido para conocer: 1) las estrategias discursivas usadas por las creadoras buscando un efecto de coorientación con la audiencia y 2) si el *fandom* expresa en Youtube la existencia de parasocialidad. Los resultados muestran que las presentadoras emplean cinco estrategias para ser percibidas como auténticas y conectar con las audiencias: la autorrevelación, el subgénero narrativo «tras la escena», la visibilidad de la salud mental, el rechazo al discurso aspiracional de los *influencers* y la simulación de interacción. En cuanto a los indicios de parasocialidad en el *fandom*, se encontró que el 63,8% de los comentarios se dirige a las presentadoras con familiaridad, el 14,4% de los textos expresa una afectividad propia del grupo primario y las gratificaciones que reconocen obtener del podcast son entretenimiento (46,5%), pertenencia a la comunidad (18,9%), autoexpresión (11%), identificación (4,7%) y la mejora de algún aspecto de su vida (4,7%).

Palabras clave: PSI; PSR; relaciones públicas; podcàsting; *fandom*; YouTube

1. Introduction and state of the art

This paper analyzes the *Estirando el chicle* (EEC) [Stretching the chewing gum] audiovisual podcast as a success story in creating a fan community that has helped turn a self-produced podcast launched in May 2020 into one of the most played podcasts of 2021 in Spain, and winner of Best Podcast at the 2021 Ondas Awards (Casares, 2021). The podcast's narrative strategies and the use of YouTube's communicative possibilities, which facilitate parasocial

relationships and interactions (hereinafter PSRs and PSIs), are described. Likewise, the way its fans communicate on YouTube is analyzed to understand what type of gratifications are found in the podcast and whether there are signs of PSIs and PSRs in their comments.

1.1. Engagement and parasociality in maintaining public relations

Building and maintaining co-oriented relationships between an organization and its audiences of interest is one of the essential components of professionally maintaining public relations (Castillo, 2009; Lane and Kent, 2018). The emergence of social media platforms in the media environment caused many authors to view them as the obvious choice for making the dialogic nature of the two-way symmetrical model of public relations a reality (Van Ruler, 2015; Xifra and Grau, 2010). As Shoai (2020) indicates, however, the connection between dialogue and technology hardly seems to have fulfilled its potential, since many professionals have interpreted the idea of engagement as more of a discourse than a dialogue, and have failed to focus on true co-orientation. Other papers show that little involvement in online dialogue is detected in areas where it could be assumed that there is a more dialogic attitude, such as activism (Sá, 2020) or a public administration-citizen relationship (Marcos-García, Doménech-Fabregat and Casero-Ripollés, 2021).

In this context, some authors notice how organizations, business leaders and celebrities communicate with their audiences by promoting the appearance of parasocial interactions and relationships (Caro-Castaño, 2015; Coombs and Holladay, 2015; Tsai and Men, 2017). The term was coined by Horton and Wohl (2006/1956) to refer to the illusion of reciprocal interaction which audience members experience towards figures in the media. In the field of public relations, these interactions are considered to be parasocial interactions when dialogue and mutual orientation are replaced by communicative strategies that simulate face-to-face interaction and seek to produce an illusion of proximity and authenticity.

In terms of the expectations of audience interaction, the evolution of social media should be reviewed, from an initial phase when it was used to manage one's network of contacts, to a later stage when it became a space focused on content consumption (Ellison and Boyd, 2013). In the case of YouTube, Khan (2017) observes the notion of engagement with an active dimension (uploading a video, publishing a comment, using the "like" button), as well as with a passive dimension (watching a video, reading comments), the latter being more common and directly connected to the main gratification of YouTube: entertainment and escape (Khan, 2017). Thus, Lacalle, Gómez-Morales and Narvaiza (2021) explain in their study on the fandom of fiction series in Spain that these users showed more interest in using characters and plot lines to express things about themselves than in interacting with other fans, observing how the dialogic expectation of users would have

decreased in favor of more passive behavior. In this regard, this paper asks (RQ1): What discursive strategies are developed by EEC's creators to generate engagement among its fandom on YouTube?

1.2. Parasocial interactions and relationships in the fandom

Digital platforms offer a hybrid space where a figure in the media shows their private life in a public way, expressing themselves authentically and maintaining a level of intimacy through emotional work (Marwick, 2015). As Rosaen and Dibble (2017) explain, the more genuine they appear to their audience and the greater their similarity to real people, the greater the chance that PSIs and PSRs occur. Self-revelation enhances the spectator's feeling of having a relationship similar to the relationship that they would have with members of their inner circles. Greater empathy for the public figure, as well as for the members of the community, is thus developed (Preece and Ghozati, 2001). This parasociality stems, in part, from the process of identification, in which the fan establishes a relationship of similarity between the figure in the media and themselves, and the process of projection, in which the fan projects their wishes, attitudes or prejudices on the figure (Macé, 1997). The study by Thelwall et al. (2022), which proposes analyzing user comments that address figures in the media using the pronoun "you" as an indicator of potential PSI, is useful because this pronoun expresses a stronger interaction. Likewise, the authors propose the concept of "semi-PSI" to differentiate an imaginary interaction from new interactions that are allowed by social media platforms and are real but do not guarantee that the information actually reaches the recipient.

Under the perspective of the uses and gratifications theory, several authors view PSRs as a compensatory relationship. With these PSRs, the aim is to meet social needs (Escalas and Bettman, 2017) with celebrities and, more specifically, with microcelebrities (Hwang and Zhang, 2018) who appear to be more accessible. The narrowing gap between said figures and fans (Marwick, 2015), however, leads to parasocial interactions and relationships that are complementary in nature. In this context, there is reason to believe that for the fan this parasocial relationship is experienced as an extension (Lacalle et al., 2021) rather than a behavior that compensates for the deficiencies in their social relationships. Interactions and relationships of this type fulfill information needs, emotional needs, needs for social integration and needs for entertainment and escape (Phua, Jin and Kim, 2017), without implying that in-person experiences will be replaced.

The following research questions are thus formulated: (RQ2) What type of gratifications and relationships are observed in the comments of fans of the podcast on YouTube? (RQ3) Are there elements that indicate parasociality in their communication?

1.3. Engagement and parasocial relationships as key elements of podcasting

Podcasts constitute the ideal space for establishing parasocial relationships (Perks and Turner, 2019) thanks to their ability to be integrated in the life of the listener (Perks, Turner and Tollison, 2019), the fact that they are presented as a highly personal and authentic media source (Marx et al., 2021), and due to their niche nature (Marx et al., 2021). The fact that the podcaster shares personal content is a key element, one which affects the listener's experience and the construction of parasociality (Perks and Turner, 2019; Marx et al., 2021). Indeed, this intimacy is enhanced when the listener employs headphones for podcast consumption, as it results in a greater sense of privacy and intimacy, as well as a deeply personal space (Berry, 2016). Accordingly, Perks and Turner (2019) observe that the gratifications obtained by the listener when listening to the podcast are cognitive in nature, involve social integration, or provide entertainment, among others. Some gratifications include listening to podcasts as a way of multi-tasking with other activities, as a way of making connections with other people, feeling part of a conversation, or recommending engaging content as a means of self-affirmation and building one's identity (Perks and Turner, 2019; Perks et al., 2019). Therefore, although listening to podcasts is presented as a solitary activity, it offers a series of gratifications related to connecting with other listeners or with the host (Perks et al., 2019).

Aroesti (2021) explains that the increase in podcast consumption and, as a result, PSR constructions rose during the COVID-19 lockdown period. According to the author, there were times when listening to podcasts led to such a feeling of intimacy that these relationships even began to replace the very intimacy of relationships in one's primary circle, the first relationship being one that was not as significant or profound as the second. Likewise, during lockdown, contact between friends and family was mediated by technology, thus causing the lines between the relationship with podcasters and friends to become blurred.

The following research questions are thus formulated: (RQ4) Do EEC's creators use the communicative potential of the medium (YouTube) to generate engagement and parasociality? (RQ5) How did the situation of lockdown affect podcast production and its consumption?

2. Objectives and methodology

The main objective of this paper is to understand the keys to the success of the *Estirando el Chicle* podcast (Iglesias and Martín, 2020-present), focusing on the connection between the program and its creators and its social audiences to determine whether elements of parasociality exist. The following specific objectives are therefore defined:

SO1. Describe the content of the podcast and the type of discursive strategies used by its creators to simulate co-orientation with the public.

SO2. Understand the communication with which its fandom engages with the program on YouTube and whether signs of parasociality can be inferred from their comments.

To achieve this, the case study method is used, with a mixed design that combines discourse analysis and content analysis. Discourse analysis is used as a central technique based on a corpus of 60 podcasts – the first four seasons up to episode 4x15. In the first phase of fieldwork, the researchers watched all 60 podcasts to define the conceptual categories of the study, following the proposal of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss, 2017). Based on these categories, and now in the second phase, 11 episodes were viewed again to transcribe and code them. For convenience, the selection criterion was chosen for seven units of analysis, where the first and last episode of each season was used to see how the hosts introduce themselves and bid farewell to the public, understanding that these moments are particularly important when it comes to establishing and maintaining their relationship with the fandom; and four episodes were randomly chosen from a table of random numbers. Coding was carried out using Nvivo 12 software.

In the third phase, comments by EEC followers on YouTube were taken into consideration to understand the fandom's response. These were analyzed using both discourse analysis and content analysis (Krippendorf, 2004) to measure the extent to which certain factors indicating parasociality were present: whether the person directs their message at the creators (the use of "you", Thelwall et al., 2022), the use of affective language belonging to the primary group, or the recognition of gratifications and relationships that go beyond entertainment. The main conceptual categories were operationalized in variables for this second technique and an *ad hoc* codebook was developed (Table 1). Coding was carried out on 660 comments made by followers on the 11 episodes studied. At the time the data was manually collected, these episodes had 5,136 comments, meaning that 13% of the universe has been analyzed.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Estirando el chicle *as a success story*

EEC ranked as one of the most played podcasts in Spain in 2021 (Ovelar, 2022). The hosts, Carolina Iglesias and Victoria Martín, have experience as professional comedians and launched their web series *Válidas* [*Valid*] (Iglesias, Martín and Pardo, 2020) on YouTube in March 2020 (Ovelar, 2022). After the series ended and during the nationwide lockdown period caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, they launched EEC in May 2020 (Ovelar, 2022). The podcast is presented as a conversation between friends, either between the hosts and collaborators or with guests to the program. They discuss topics relating to feminism and mental health, and personal anecdotes. The podcast is broadcast weekly on YouTube and on platforms such as Spotify, iVox and Apple Podcast.

Table 1. Codebook

Variables	Categories
Episode	
Comment text	
Comment no.	
Nickname	
Comment length	
No. of “likes” received	
No. of “dislikes” received	
No. of comments received	None, between 1 and 5, between 6 and 10, more than 10.
Gender identity	Female, male, unidentifiable.
Use of emojis	Yes/No.
Emotion expressed by the emoji	Positive, negative, other.
To whom the message is directed	Not directed to anyone in particular, directed to the podcast’s hosts, directed to another member of the community, other.
Main topic of the comment	Comment about the host(s), the interviewee(s), the podcast or other works related to the EEC universe, program consumption, mental health, feminism, biographical comment about the user, loneliness, other topics.
The comment refers to the EEC universe	Yes/No.
The person expresses what gratification EEC gives them	They identify with one of the hosts or with the experiences described by the hosts (identification); they feel accompanied or part of a community (belonging); they celebrate the podcast’s success or feel like a collaborator (projection); they express something about their identity based on the podcast (self-expression); they praise the entertainment that it provides (entertainment); the podcast improves their perception of their own physical and mental conditions; the podcast or the discourse of the hosts have inspired them or helped them improve some aspect of their life; they recognize that following the podcast has reduced their prejudices about other groups (other races, other sexual orientations, etc.); not perceived.
The person expresses more affectivity belonging to the primary group.	Yes/No.
The program or the hosts interact with the comment	They do not interact, they give a “like”, they comment.

Source: Created by authors based on Lacalle et al. (2021) and Hoffner and Bond (2022).

The podcast began as a self-produced program, broadcast from an amateur home environment (Ovelar, 2022). Given the limited resources available, they used the Patreon platform to make it easier for their fandom to make microdonations and thus contribute to the show’s development. Following its remarkable success, the second season was broadcast from the Cadena SER studios and produced by Podium Podcast. After this, *Estirando el Chicle LIVE* was created, a show bringing the virtual stage to the physical

plane in theaters throughout Spain, and selling out its 12,000 tickets for the Wizink Center in just 17 hours (Ovelar, 2022). This was the first non-musical show to do so, something unheard of for comedians and specifically unheard of for women. Moreover, at the 2021 Ondas Awards it won the award for “Best Podcast” (Casares, 2021).

3.2. *Discourse on authenticity in EEC*

Qualitative coding of the videos established three major conceptual categories that encompass the focus and content of EEC. Figure 1 provides a summary, indicating textual examples from the podcast and the feedback that they receive from the fandom in comments on the videos. Due to how frequently it is found, as well as the strategies used to convey it, the most important category is authenticity, which is consistent with the characteristics of the podcast format (Swiatek, 2018; Marx et al., 2021) and with celebrity culture in social media (Marwick, 2015). Below, the main strategies for connecting with the audience that were observed, as well as the characteristics that define EEC’s identity and narrative universe, are reviewed.

3.2.1. *Self-revelation of private life*

Self-revelation is a strategic decision to create the social identity that is characteristic of celebrity culture: celebrities reveal facts about their private life in the media because consumer society views privacy as an indicator of authenticity (Marshall, 1998). In this vein, Iglesias and Martín tell personal stories that address intimate taboo topics, such as mental health, sexual relations or addiction. Likewise, since the podcast began during the 2020 COVID-19 lockdown period, the first season took place in private intimate spaces: Martín’s living room, Iglesias’s bedroom, and the Martín’s parents’ backyard, which they moved to when the restrictions on movement allowed them to do so (Figure 1). Access to these scenes is highly symbolic for many fans:

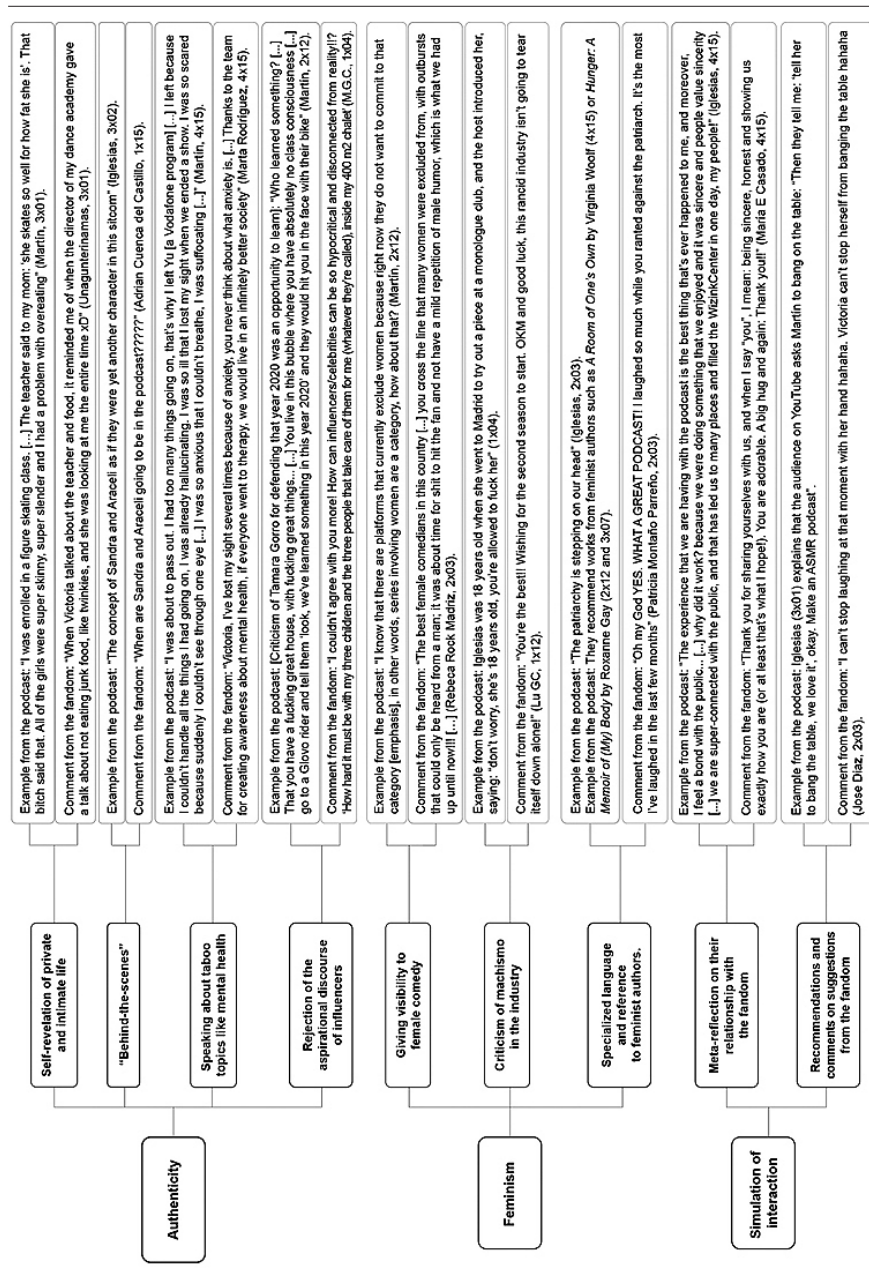
This program is the emotional accumulation of a journey that started in Victoria’s parents’ backyard and that represents an entire generation. (Cdelia chuchuchu, 4x15)

The drying rack at Martín’s parent’s home, for example, is something that the program has kept, incorporating it into its corporate visual identity. Moreover, many comments from the first season communicate appreciation for the existence of the program during lockdown:

This podcast and Válidas have kept me sane throughout quarantine [...] (Paloma Castro, 1x15)

[...] They are my saviors from quarantine [...] (Milagros Ríos, 3x01).

Figure 1. Conceptual categories



Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 2. Screenshots of private intimate scenes from the first season

Source: YouTube (<<https://bit.ly/37dBxU1>>, <<https://bit.ly/3j08ki3>>).

The feeling that the podcast creates among its followers is one that makes them feel as if they are part of a private conversation between two friends, as Aida Addrissi explained (4x15):

I spent the whole time smiling [...]. I love this section of you two without a guest, it was really great because it's just the two of you talking about self-esteem and anxiety. Thank you so much for the program, I feel like I'm sitting with two friends, the best friends in the world [...].

Decisions about how the program will run in upcoming seasons add to this feeling of shared intimacy, decisions such as asking guests to bring their own panties to the podcast as an intimate element that can be related to the joke involving Martín's parent's drying rack.

3.2.2. Use of the “behind-the-scenes” subgenre

One common strategy involves the use of the “behind-the-scenes” narrative subgenre, in which elements remaining outside the frame, literally and figuratively, are shared with the spectator, helping to generate a feeling of shared intimacy. Thus, regular viewers know the names of the program's entire production team and the relationships between them.

The audience know the people who are part of the hosts' private sphere, despite having never seen them, since the hosts talk about experiences with these people, such as Sandra and Araceli, whom Martín mentions often as her only two childhood friends. Iglesias's mother has also been mentioned on the podcast several times, even appearing in a scene via a private WhatsApp voice message (3x07). The verism achieved by the podcast is such that that a fan pointed out the difficulty in distinguishing reality from fiction, as noted in the following comment (1x01):

[Nine !]: I don't know how to tell Victoria's character from the real Victoria, help!!! Hahahaha.

[Carolina Iglesias (Percebesygrelos)]: It's a trick: SHE'S THE SAME THE ENTIRE TIME.

The "behind-the-scenes" element is also used in relation to brands and possible sponsors. Several coded episodes contain references to brands that they would like to collaborate with or with which they have had contact, even mentioning that the brand wasn't interested and making jokes with insults (2x12). All of this therefore creates a sense of access to what Goffman (1999) termed the backstage of social interaction, the area that could only be accessed by equals and where it is assumed that the subject leaves their stage persona and can exit the frame of what is politically correct.

3.2.3. *Mental health awareness*

Both hosts explain the importance of seeing a psychologist, and they recommend that their viewers take care of this aspect in seven of the eleven episodes coded. The last episode studied ("Es para reflexionar" [*Something to reflect on*], 4x15) specifically focuses on talking about the mental problems that both hosts faced prior to their success in the final months of 2021.

Mental health awareness is so present in the podcast that it is directly related to the hosts' type of humor, as can be observed in this excerpt with Martín and a collaborator:

Lala Chus: If we didn't suffer from anxiety, do you think we would be different, that we would make a different program? Or do you think that anxiety made us create this type of content?

Victoria Martín: For me, it's the driving force.

Discussing these issues with candidness and humor is an aspect that, while not among the main topics addressed by the fandom – it is only 3.5% of the sample (see graph 1) –, it is a topic that many fans identify with:

Oh, I understand overeating, when I was a child this never happened to me but now it does. After eating a lot, I feel guilty :((Brisas, 3x01)

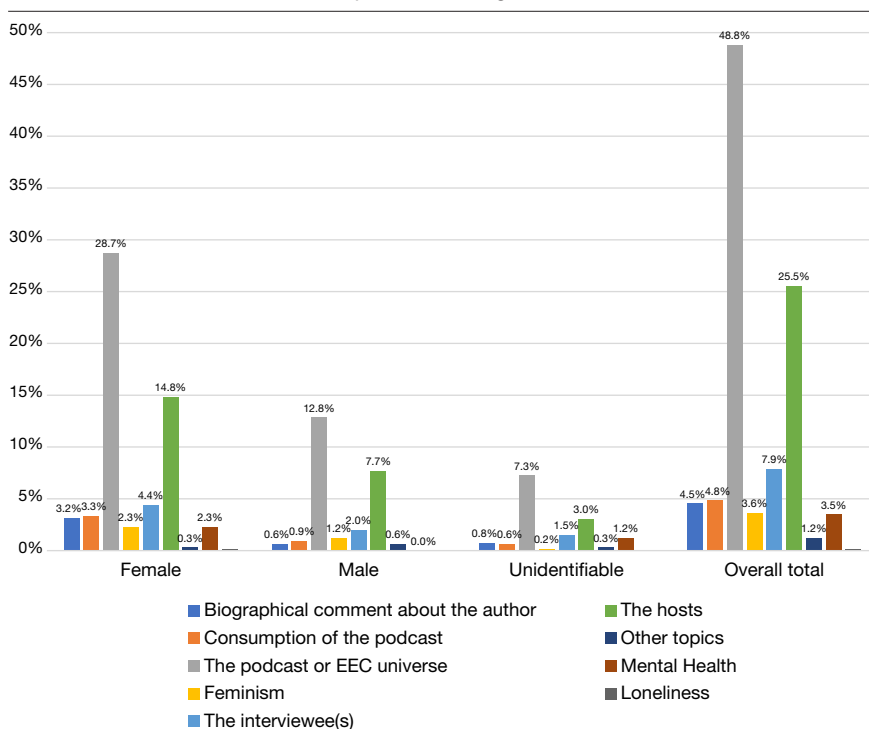
3.2.4. *Rejection of aspirational discourse*

Another strategy to connect with the fandom is the criticism of the aspirational discourse of influencers (Duffy, 2017):

Super famous people who want to show how authentic they are all the time really piss me off. (Martín, 3x01)

This rejection is supported by constantly expressing their own miseries in the least favorable way possible for their reputations, one of the key aspects of their comedy. This way of presenting themselves makes it easier for the community to connect with the hosts and identify with them:

Thank you so much for talking about topics [...] that are completely avoided on social media or are made to seem as if everything is wonderful. (Raquii, 3x07)

Graph 1. Distribution of comment topics based on gender

Source: Own elaboration.

I identified with this 100%. You represent an entire generation, girls. (Olga Roig, 3x07)

There is recognition of something that is non-strategic and unenviable about their own lives and their careers in comedy. This can be observed in their careless relationship with brands or the fact that they acknowledge the financial element of this relationship compared to the emotional discourse that influencers use to recommend brands. It can also be seen in how they call on their own followers, constantly using direct foul language, which contrasts with the friendly language used by influencers:

People are bastards [...]. People haven't shared the series like they should have and it's all your fault. (Martín, 1x01)

Moreover, it is observed how they insist on their own condition as non-famous, ordinary people (Rosaen and Dibble, 2017) and show the precariousness of their own employment situation. Thus, they explained their response

to their surroundings when interviewed by the program *Late Motiv* (Movistar+, 2016-2021):

People were really excited because for them we're like two drifters. [...] Every time a door opens for us somewhere, people celebrate it. (Iglesias, 3x18)

3.2.5. *Simulation of interaction*

The hosts seek to engage with and give visibility to fans in EEC, carrying out actions that simulate co-orientation with the public, since it is impossible to establish a true relationship with each fan due to time constraints. This simulation is distinguished, on one hand, by how they call on the audience by giving recommendations in episodes:

Treat people well because they are people... and if the other person is disgusting, well, then treat them badly. (Martín, 1x04)

And also when they refer to the community following comments made, in the proposals they offer as a way of giving thanks:

Our audience is the best audience in the whole wide world. (Iglesias, 4x01)

An example of this is when they engage with the audience, asking what to do with the underwear brought by guests to the program. Laura Tomás Pujol (3x18) answers:

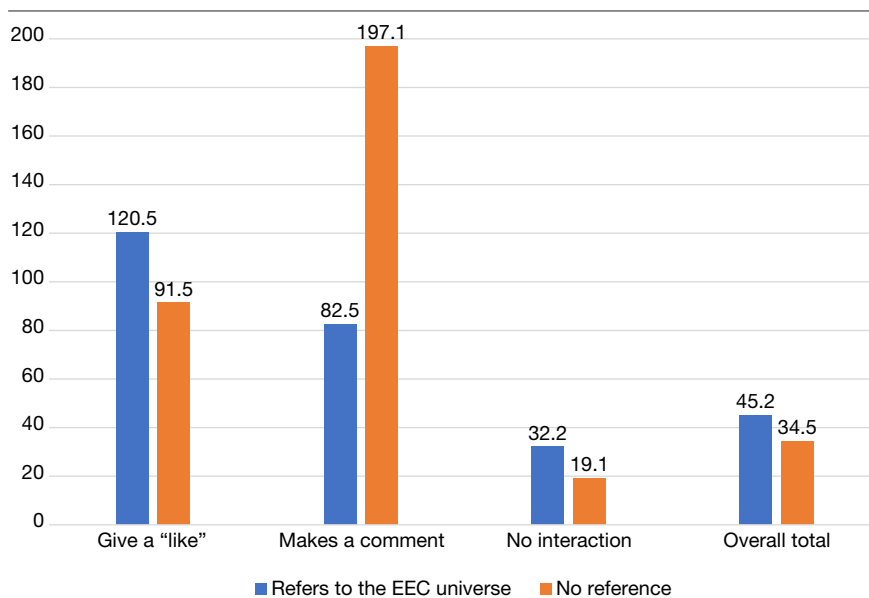
Hopefully next season the set will be full of framed underwear, kind of like the Hard Rock Café, with a golden plaque [...]

At the beginning of the following season, Iglesias (4x01) answers the proposals suggested by the public:

What will we do with the panties that we removed from there? No idea. [...] Only crazy people give ideas like the ones we're receiving.

On the other hand, this simulation is developed through the program's interaction with YouTube comments. Graph 2 shows that, of the overall total, the comments that are most talked-about by the program and by the fandom refer to the EEC universe, attracting a higher average number of "likes" compared to comments that do not mention it – an average of 45.2 compared to 34.5. Thus, the existence of program interaction is observed, in addition to how the fandom rewards this participation with many "likes" as a way of recognizing fans and the hosts (Preece and Ghazati, 2001) and as a way of feeling involved in the interaction; this is consistent with the results of other research (Tsai and Men, 2017; Perks et al., 2019).

Graph 2. Average number of “likes” based on the interaction the comment receives from the program and if it refers to the EEC universe



Source: Own elaboration.

3.3. *The feminist claim*

Feminism appears to be the “natural” perspective from which the topics of the podcast are analyzed, both when talking about personal experiences and when referring to the profession. Iglesias (2x12) explains her “hatred” towards the fact that the traditional industry considers series led by women to be intended for a single target, as if the fact that the protagonist is female already defines a genre in and of itself. Confronted with this situation where femininity is considered a market niche, Iglesias and Martín assert that their comedy is not only intended for women. In this vein, if the gender identity expressed by those who comment on their videos is analyzed, a female majority is observed: 59.3% female compared to 25.8% male and 14.8% unidentifiable.

To help increase the visibility of female comedy, starting in the fourth season they started to incorporate different Spanish female comedians as program collaborators. Likewise, as of the third season, the podcast’s format changed and it started to incorporate interviews with female public figures, with the only exception being fellow comedian Iggi Rubin (2x05), the only man invited to talk about clichés regarding male-female friendships.

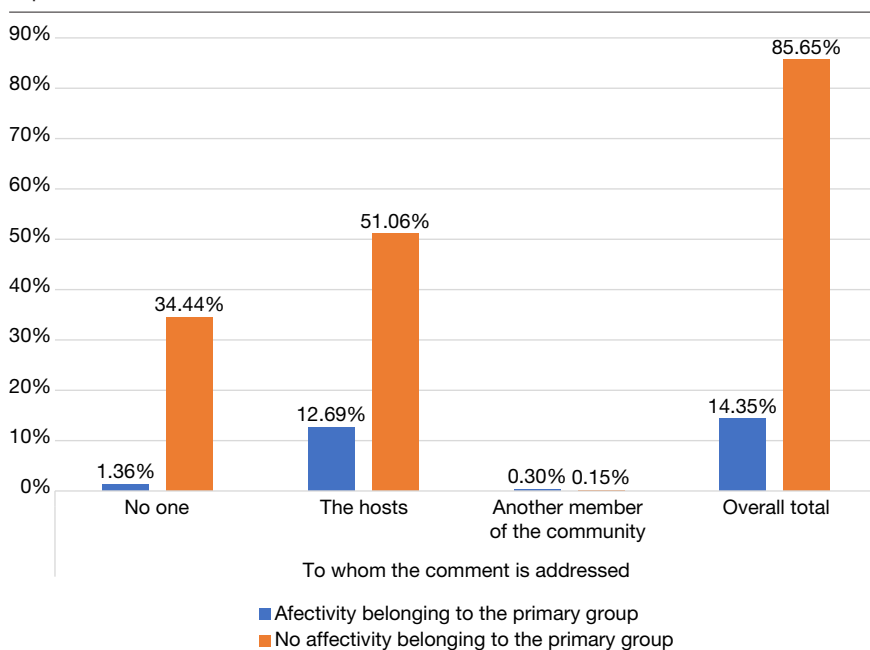
Another characteristic feature of the program is the use of its own terminology for feminist theory, such as references to the patriarchy, intersectionality or the commitment to trans-inclusive language – “Bienvenidas, bien-

venidos, bienvenides” in Spanish [*Welcome* in English, using female, male and non-specific endings] is how Iglesias typically greets listeners. In spite of this, feminism was the main topic of only 3.6% of the comments analyzed (graph 1).

3.4. Gratifications, parasociality and engagement

The results from the content analysis reveal strong parasocial potential, in accordance with the proposal by Thelwall et al. (2022). 63.8% of the comments analyzed were directed at the hosts, using “you”, compared to 35.8% of the comments that weren’t intended for anyone specifically. In graph 3, two variables that would indicate a higher degree of parasociality by the fans are shown: the expression of affectivity belonging to the primary group and the fact that the podcast’s creators are directly addressed.

Graph 3. Distribution of comments based on who is speaking and the affectivity that they express



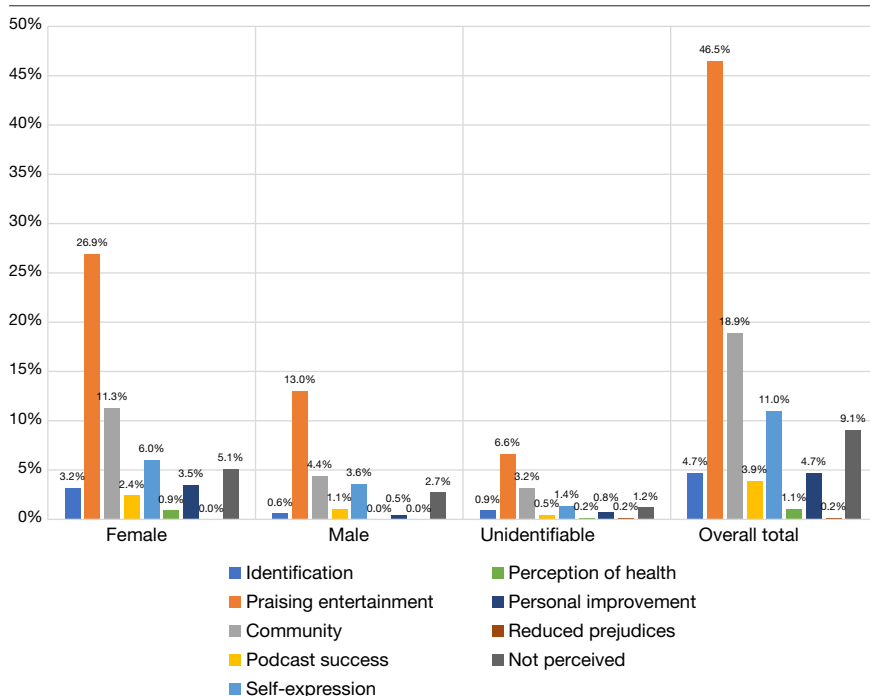
Source: Own elaboration.

14.4% of the comments express this type of intimate affectivity, with 12.7% focusing on addressing the comedians, to whom they project a feeling of shared intimacy that translates into gratification with deep emotional meaning, as expressed by user Carlos PJ (1x15):

[...] You are the type of people that I would love the world to be full of. [...] Thank you for filling my heart with wonderful things during a very difficult time in my life.

In general, and in line with the absence of “dislikes”, the emojis used in the comments are positive in nature (86.5%).

Graph 4. Distribution of gratifications based on gender and the average number of “likes”



Source: Own elaboration.

Graph 4 shows the gratifications expressed by the fandom, where entertainment is the main gratification (46.5%), which is expected since it is a comedy podcast, and this is consistent with the results of other studies on YouTube (Khan, 2017). The second gratification is the feeling of belonging to a community (18.9%), followed by self-expression (11%). 4.7% of fans indicate that they identify with the narrative of the podcast and another 4.7% explain that the podcast has helped them improve their life, the latter taking into account one of the benefits that PSI and PSR can offer audiences (Hoffner and Bond, 2022).

Although the user is aware of the parasocial nature of experiences of this type, they experience them equally as real and significant:

I turned this podcast on in the background while I worked and during that time: I laughed, I cried, I felt identified and I felt very proud of three people that I don't know. Thank you so much. (Cristina Torres Ramirez, 4x15)

This comment demonstrates the active dimension of audiences when it comes to getting involved with content that engages them emotionally, and it reflects how the affordances of social media offer new possibilities of symbolic co-orientation and involvement among users, brands and public figures (Caro-Castaño, 2015; Tsai and Men, 2017).

4. Conclusions

The results of the analysis show that the success of the EEC podcast lies in the ability of its creators to develop a cultural product that easily assumes a feminist perspective and creates comedy from the self-revelation of the private and intimate lives of its creators. It creates the feeling of being part of a conversation between two friends who share their stories about a specific topic in each program. With regards to the discursive strategies developed to generate engagement among its fandom on YouTube (RQ1), the following strategies are found:

- a) The narration of private and intimate personal anecdotes using informal and often vulgar language, which helps transmit a feeling of proximity and trust.
- b) The use of the "behind-the-scenes" narrative subgenre, which encourages audiences to become involved with EEC beyond simply listening to it, by learning about the production team, the personal relationships among them, the difficulties of self-producing the podcast during the pandemic, etc.
- c) Awareness of the importance of mental health by bringing their own problems to light, which reflects the message of proximity and veracity through vulnerability.
- d) Rejection of the aspirational discourse of celebrities and influencers. Offering their intimacy and opinions without trying to show a perfect and enviable life makes it easier for the fandom to identify and connect with them.
- e) Use of the communicative affordances of YouTube to simulate co-orientation with the audience by means of making recommendations in the podcasts and directly interacting through comments and "likes" on the comments of the fandom. These actions generate the feeling of presence and feedback from the podcasters and give visibility to fans within the EEC universe. Thus, RQ4 is also answered.

Starting the podcast in the midst of the COVID-19 lockdown period meant that the first season took place completely in the private spaces of the

hosts and their family members. This generated anecdotes and elements that were highly symbolic for the fandom, while also providing them with greater opportunities for consuming content that led many to find help in the podcast to get through the lockdown period (RQ5).

With regards to the relationships and gratifications expressed by the fandom (RQ2), entertainment accounts for nearly half of the comments (46.5%), followed by belonging to a community (18.9%) and self-expression (11%). Lastly, indicators of parasociality in the fandom have been detected (RQ3): 63.75% of the comments analyzed directly addressed the hosts using “you”, while at the same time a small but significant portion (14.35%) expressed affectivity belonging to the primary group in their comments.

These conclusions point to the advantages of studying parasociality as a growing aspect of the gratifications and engagement that may occur among users, brands and public figures in social media. In this sense, it is recommended that future research further analyze how new forms of consumption and interaction enabled by these platforms, and the strategies of authenticity developed by the hosts of this kind of content, foster the emergence of new, significant experiences (both social and parasocial) among audiences. In the same vein, it would be useful to investigate the opportunities that the digital context and these types of authenticity strategies offer for brands and organizations to connect with their stakeholders.

Bibliographical references

- AROESTI, R. (2021). “Tragic but true: how podcasters replaced our real friends”. *The Guardian Life*. Retrieved from <<https://acortar.link/6grkVu>> [20/12/2021].
- BERRY, R. (2016). “Podcasting: Considering the evolution of the medium and its association with the word ‘radio’”. *Radio Journal: International Studies in Broadcast & Audio*, 14 (1), 7-22.
<https://doi.org/10.1386/rjao.14.1.7_1>
- CARO-CASTAÑO, L. (2015). “Relaciones e interacciones parasociales en redes sociales digitales. Una revisión conceptual”. *Revista Icono14*, 13 (2), 23-47.
<<https://doi.org/10.7195/ri14.v13i2.853>>
- CASARES, B. (2021). “*Estirando el chicle*, premio Ondas 2021 a mejor podcast: ‘La violencia que sufrimos las mujeres en internet es muy fuerte’”. *LaSexta.com*. Retrieved from <<https://bit.ly/3j7WmDk>>.
- CASTILLO, A. (2009). *Relaciones Públicas. Teoría e historia*. Barcelona: UOC.
- COOMBS, W. T. and HOLLADAY, S. J. (2015). “Public relations ‘relationship identity’ in research: Enlightenment or illusion”. *Public Relations Review*, 41 (5), 689-695.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2013.12.008>>
- DUFFY, B. E. (2017). *(Not) getting paid to do what you love: Gender, social media, and aspirational work*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- ELLISON, N. and BOYD, D. (2013). “Sociality through social network sites”. In: W. H. DUTTON (Ed.). *The Oxford Handbook of Internet Studies*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 151-172.

- ESCALAS, J. E. and BETTMAN, J. R. (2017). "Connecting with celebrities: How consumers appropriate celebrity meanings for a sense of belonging". *Social Science Electronic Publishing*, 46 (2), 297-308.
<<https://doi.org/10.1080/00913367.2016.1274925>>
- GLASER, B. G. and STRAUSS, A. L. (2017). *The discovery of grounded theory. Strategies for qualitative research*. London/New York: Routledge.
- GOFFMAN, E. (1999). *The presentation of self in everyday life*. New York: Anchor Books/Doubleday.
- HOFFNER, C. A. and BOND, B. J. (2022). "Parasocial Relationships, Social Media & Well-Being". *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 45.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2022.101306>>
- HORTON, D. and WOHL, R. (2006/1956). "Mass communication and para-social interaction: Observations on intimacy at a distance". *Particip@tions*, 3(1). Retrieved from <<https://www.participations.org/03-01-04-horton.pdf>>.
- HWANG, K. and ZHANG, Q. (2018). "Influence of parasocial relationship between digital celebrities and their followers on followers' purchase and electronic word-of-mouth intentions, and persuasion knowledge". *Computers in Human Behavior*, 87, 155-173.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2018.05.029>>
- IGLESIAS, C. and MARTÍN, V. (2020-present). *Estirando el chicle* [audiovisual podcast]. Podium Podcast. Retrieved from <<https://www.estirandoelchicle.es/podcast>>.
- KHAN, M. L. (2017). "Social media engagement: What motivates user participation and consumption on YouTube?". *Computers in Human Behavior*, 66, 236-247.
<<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chb.2016.09.024>>
- KRIPPENDORFF, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. London: Sage.
- LACALLE, C., GÓMEZ-MORALES, B.M. and NARVAIZA, S. (2021). "Friends or just fans? Parasocial relationships in online television fiction communities". *Communication & Society*, 34 (3), 61-76.
<<https://doi.org/10.15581/003.34.3.61-76>>
- LANE, A. and KENT, M. L. (2018). "Dialogic engagement". In: K. JOHNSTON and M. TAYLOR (Eds.). *The handbook of communication engagement*. Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 61-72.
- MACÉ, E. (1997). "La televisión del pobre". In: D. DAYAN (Coord.). *En busca del público: recepción, televisión, medios*. Barcelona: Gedisa, 185-206.
- MARCOS-GARCÍA, S., DOMÉNECH-FABREGAT, H. and CASERO-RIPOLLÉS, A. (2021). The platformization of institutional political communication. The use of WhatsApp by local administrations. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 79, 100-125.
<<https://doi.org/10.4185/RLCS-2021-1520>>
- MARSHALL, P. D. (1998). *Celebrity and power*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- MARWICK, A. (2015). "You May Know Me from YouTube: (Micro-)Celebrity in Social Media". In: P. D. MARSHALL and S. REDMOND (Eds.). *A Companion to Celebrity*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 333-350.
<<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118475089.ch18>>
- MARX, J., MIRBABAIE, M., BRENDL, A. B. and ZANDER, K. (2021). "The Role of Parasocial Interactions for Podcast Backchannel Response". In *AMCIS 2021 Proceedings*. Retrieved from <https://aisel.aisnet.org/amcis2021/strategic_is/strategic_is/2>.

- VELAR, M. (2022). “*Estirando el chicle, más que Válidas: ‘Ahora es cuando los grandes de la industria nos prestan atención’*”. *Forbes.es*. Retrieved from <<https://forbes.es/podcast/140866/estirando-el-chicle-mas-que-validas/>>.
- PERKS, L. G. and TURNER, J. S. (2019). “Podcasts and Productivity: A Qualitative Uses and Gratifications Study”. *Mass Communication and Society*, 22 (1), 96-116. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15205436.2018.1490434>>
- PERKS, L. G., TURNER, J. S. and TOLLISON, A. C. (2019). “Podcast Uses and Gratifications Scale Development”. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 63 (4), 617-634. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2019.1688817>>
- PHUA, J., JIN, S. V. and KIM, J. (2017). “Gratifications of using Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, or Snapchat to follow brands: The moderating effect of social comparison, trust, tie strength, and network homophily on brand identification, brand engagement, brand commitment, and membership intention”. *Telematics and Informatics*, 34 (1), 412-424. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tele.2016.06.004>>
- PREECE, J. J. and GHOZATI, K. (2001). “Experiencing empathy online”. In: R. E. RICE, and J. E. KATZ (Eds.). *The Internet and health communication: Experiences and Expectations*. London: Sage, 237-260. <<https://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781452233277>>
- ROSAEN, S. F. and DIBBLE, J. L. (2017). “The impact of viewer perceptions of media personae and viewer characteristics on the strength, enjoyment, and satisfaction of parasocial relationships”. *Communication Studies*, 68 (1), 1-21. <<https://doi.org/10.1080/10510974.2016.1240701>>
- SA, S. (2020). “As RP em rede e o envolvimento dialógico em plataformas feministas (“A Coletiva” e “INMUNE”)”. *Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas*, 10 (20), 5-26. <<http://dx.doi.org/10.5783/RIRP-20-2020-02-05-26>>
- SHOAI, A. (2020). “Diálogo entre organizaciones y públicos en la era digital: la ‘promesa incumplida’ de los nuevos medios y el discurso de la consultoría en España”. *Profesional de la información*, 29 (3), e290321. <<https://doi.org/10.3145/epi.2020.may.21>>
- SWIATEK, L. (2018). “The podcast as an intimate bridging medium”. In: D. LLINARES, N. FOX and R. BERRY (Eds.). *Podcasting. New Aural Cultures and Digital Media*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 173-187. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90056-8_9>
- TSAI, W.-H. S. and MEN, L. R. (2017). Social CEOs: The effects of CEOs’ communication styles and parasocial interaction on social networking sites. *New Media & Society*, 19 (11), 1848-1867. <<https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444816643922>>
- THELWALL, M., STUART, E., MAS-BLEDA, A., MAKITA, M. and ABDOLI, M. (2022). “I’m nervous about sharing this secret with you: YouTube influencers generate strong parasocial interactions by discussing personal issues”. *Journal of Data and Information Science*, 7 (2). <<https://doi.org/10.2478/jdis-2022-0011>>
- VAN RULER, B. (2015). “Agile Public Relations Planning: The Reflective Communication Scrum”. *Public Relations Review*, 41 (2), 187-194. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2014.11.008>>
- XIFRA, J. and GRAU, F. (2010). “Nanoblogging PR: The discourse on public relations in Twitter”. *Public Relations Review*, 36 (2), 171-174. <<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubrev.2010.02.005>>