
Special issue
Credibility

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Submitted
October 1st, 2018
Approved
November 9th, 2018

© 2019
Communication & Society
ISSN 0214-0039
E ISSN 2386-7876
doi: 10.15581/003.32.1.161-177
www.communication-society.com

2019 – Vol. 32(1)
pp. 161-177

How to cite this article:
Fernández-Souto, A. B., Puentes -
Rivera, I. & Vázquez-Gestal, M.
(2019). The communicative
management of large companies in
Spain: structure, resources and
main challenges of their managers.
Communication & Society, 32(1),
161-177.

The communicative management of large companies in Spain: structure, resources and main challenges of their managers

Abstract

This article studies the communicative structures of the main companies in Spain. Based on the fact that these organisations have significant economic and human resources, the structure of their communication areas is analysed, as well as the specific training of their top managers. In addition, the article will outline the main concerns that these organisational structures have with regard to the day-to-day management of business communication (transparency, reputation, identity, etc.). To do this, the object of the study is made up of the main companies in the Spanish continuous market, some of them included in the Ibex 35 in 2018. This population has been selected because it has the greatest impact on the national economy and is susceptible to greater information transparency.

Keywords

Communication, company, organisation, public relations, department.

1. Introduction and theoretical framework

As mentioned above, this article collects data about internal organisational structures responsible for the communication of Spanish companies with the largest revenue. To that end, data are obtained directly from analysed companies and are in turn compared to those from other sectors.

This investigation is innovative and supplementary, as it not only analyses in this particular domain the aspects of those communication departments that other studies research in other domains, but also

provides new data about the challenges and evolution prospects of the profession.

1.1. Corporate communication in Spain

In order to more precisely contextualise the policy, strategies and/or communication resources of large Spanish companies and, in particular, the results obtained from this research, it is appropriate to begin with a general analysis of communication practices in Spain in both public and private organisations. A field of study in which scientific literature is wide and rich.

There are several studies on communicative management in diverse domains of Spanish corporate activities such as large companies (Moreno & Capriotti, 2006), SMEs (Fernández-Souto & Puentes-Rivera, 2014), Spanish listed companies (Costa-Sánchez & Fontenla, 2016), their management on social media (Aced & Lalueza, 2016; Duránte-Stolle, 2017), their social corporate responsibility (Pérez-Martínez & Topa, 2018), polluting companies and their crisis communication (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestal, 2015), lobbies (Castillo, Smolak-Lozano & Fernández-Souto, 2017), business clusters (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestal, 2018b), or even the different sports leagues (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera y Vázquez Gestal, 2018a), and the relationship between media and departments (Almansa, Castillo & Fernández-Souto, 2018).

There are also many studies on communicative management in the public and social domains, such as universities and research centres (Simón, 2015), local councils (Fernández-Souto & Vázquez-Gestal, 2014), provincial governments (Puentes-Rivera, 2017), migrants' centres (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera & Vázquez-Gestal, 2018c), public radio and television and their transparency and accountability policies (López-López, Puentes-Rivera & Rúas-Araújo, 2017), NGOs (Salvador i Peris, 1999), or the general profile of communication managers (DIRCOM, 2018).

However, none of the referenced studies address the issues discussed in this article as a whole, focused, as already mentioned, on the study of communication departments of Spanish companies with the largest revenue and their human resources departments, as well as the implemented professional practices. Those addressing in certain cases a similar issue, though not the same one, are always studies from several years ago, from what could be described as the pre-crisis period, and therefore need significant updating.

At an international level, there are also several references investigating the communicative management of a wide range of public and private organisations (Moss, Likely, Sriramesh & Ferrari, 2017; Túñez,-López, Martínez-Fernández, López-García, Rúas-Araújo & Campos-Freire, 2019; Golding, Raeymaeckers & Sousa, 2017), especially corporate ones (Cook, 2017; Falkheimer, Heide, Nothhaft, Von Platen, Simonsson & Andersson, 2016) but, again, there are no studies investigating as a whole the issues addressed in this article. The closest approximation would be the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič & Moreno, 2018a) but, as is well known, it focuses more on working conditions and communication managers' expectations and perceptions for the future of the profession, rather than on the existence or absence of specialised departments within companies or the resources allocated to them; in addition to the challenges or the most recent specific problems of the profession on each edition, as in the case of fake news in the 2018 study.

Based on the issues discussed above, this article aims to perform an unprecedented analysis of large Spanish companies' communication departments. Accordingly, it is relevant to begin the theoretical analysis by discussing communication departments in Spain, from their definition to their current structure, going through their historical evolution and their presence in different public and private organisations.

There is a myriad of definitions and theoretical attempts to narrow down the meaning of communications, public relations, internal/external relations department, etc., but as a starting point we will adopt, due to its clarity and specificity, Ramírez's definition (1995, p. 27), who states that "communication departments are active, organised and often stable sources of information meeting both the internal and external communication needs of those organisations and/or high-profile individuals who wish to convey a positive self-image to society and therefore influencing public opinion."

The denominative imprecision of communication departments, which, as mentioned on the previous paragraph, adopt different names, both when defining departmental tasks (communications, public relations, marketing, etc.) and their categorisation (office,

department, section, etc.) also creates imprecision and insecurity when narrowing down what a communication department is and what it is not, giving this name to all kinds of human teams, from those that, as noted by Simon (2015, p. 69) are “offices merely performing functions regarding relations with the media,” to structures much more complex at the highest executive level of the company which make –like other senior management departments– decisions related to general strategy and business organisation, not simply and strictly communicative.

Arroyo & Yus (2011, p. 26) perfectly illustrate these different realities stating that:

In the structure of large organisations –in the small ones, only one person exercises all the functions– there is usually a press officer and, when this happens, they report to the Director of Communications, but the first one is the equivalent of a waiter serving the food, while the DIRCOM, the ultimate head of that department, is like the chef, who defines strategies and directs tactic implementation as a whole.

There is a degree of consensus among authors when stating that “this lack of terminological precision is attributable to the limited existence of public relations” (Cárdenas, 2000, p. 38) in Spain, but not only –as it is a reality, to varying degrees– shared within the European and Latin American contexts. This is not the case in the United States, where the term public relations originated and its application to specific communicative professional practices is regular and concrete. However, in the rest of the world, especially in Europe and Latin America, the introduction and integration of North American public relations has been modest into their routines and professional cultures, with several interpretations about the activities it encompasses and with different translations of the term that have successfully represented the true sense of the profession, more closely related to public affairs in general than to the meaning often attributed in Spanish, for example, to the expression “public relations,” a bad translation from which there is a tendency to escape and that, combined with the discretion and confidentiality usually required by this job, has prevented professionals from emphasising the value of their profession and advertising an essential discipline in the communication of any current public or private entity (Almansa, 2011).

Nonetheless, it is true that there are specific exceptions to the previous claims, most notably Brazil, where the term also has a significant presence due to the adoption of a more American –rather than European– perspective since the beginning of the profession in the country. Thus, since the late 1960s, in particular 1967, this activity is regulated by a specific law, which back then made possible, among other things, the creation of the first degree in Public Relations at the University of São Paulo, the implementation of a professional license or requiring that degree by law in order to exercise specific professions (Ferrari, 2011).

Almansa (2005, p. 123) makes an effort in the following table to summarise the different visions –some of the most important ones– within the Spanish cultural and professional context about what a communication department is and does, comparing several definitions provided during the 1990s, a decade of consolidation of public relations in Spain after the expansion and generalisation of the 1980s, fostered by the restoration of democracy in the country.

Table 1: Defining elements of communication departments.

Author	Reference	Definition
Ramírez	1995: 97-99	Active, organised and often stable sources.
Martín	1998: 11-14	Body analysing, executing and sharing all the communication actions.
Álvarez y Caballero	1997: 85-89	Coordination and cohesion are essential in communication. In communication, as with music and the conductor, all actions must be coordinated.
Villafañe	1999: 100-103	In charge of communication management and corporate image.
ADC/DIRCOM	1997: 154-156	Reporting directly to senior management.

Source: Almansa, 2005.

The first conclusion drawn from comparing the definitions above is that the concept and role of communication departments have significantly evolved in a relatively short time, from being simple channels of relations between organisations and their audience –mainly through traditional media–, to developing a wide range of tasks, all those possibly related to communication, understood in a broad sense, and even others, as already noted, which have nothing to do with this field but with the company’s general strategy, which becomes richer with the point of view provided by public relations since, as implied by the table above, another change in these structures is the constant ascent within the entity’s organisational chart until reaching senior management.

In line with this latter statement, 29% of communication managers in Spain are currently part of the company’s general management, compared to 52% who have a communications manager one level below the previous one. The rest of senior communication managers, 19%, are integrated into different departments without management ranking within the organisational chart of the entity in question (DIRCOM, 2018). Therefore, it can be stated that 81% of those senior managers are already part of –or report at least directly to– the highest managerial level of their organisations, a percentage that was 77% in 2014, 75% in 2010, and 73% in 2005 (DIRCOM, 2015), a tendency that is thus accelerating.

In parallel to the assumption of new duties, the names of the departments and their managers have also diversified within each organisation, further increasing diversity regarding the aforementioned nomenclature, a current ongoing disparity. The designation “Communications Direction” (Castro, 2007, p. 26) is consolidated with increasing presence (DIRCOM, 2018), but there are other persistent denominations of relative significance such as communications manager (8%) or press officer (4%) (DIRCOM, 2015).

This evolution addressed in previous paragraphs is summarised in a very graphic way by Villafañe (2001, p. 13) stating that, in no time, there has been a shift from a widespread ignorance to the current idyllic, “almost mythomaniac,” concept of it:

Corporate image and communications management has suffered, in the last 10 to 15 years, an unprecedented development in Spain. Many of our managers, especially in large corporations, have shifted from ignoring the “corporate” (which in this sense means “strategic management of corporate image”) to an almost mythomaniac overstatement, embracing communication as some kind of balm that solves everything.

This positive evolution of communication departments in Spain, though scattered, has been constant from the 1970s to the current decade, and has suffered a significant quantitative setback in the number of material and human resources, primarily during the worst years of the latest economic crisis. The 2015 Report on the State of Communication in Spain (DIRCOM, 2015) reflected it perfectly, confirming that the crisis had meant a decrease in the budget allocated for communication in 65% of studied organisations and, in 56% of them, in addition to that budget reduction, there had also been a reduction of the staff in charge of communication.

In any case, referring to the same source with updated data from 2017 (DIRCOM, 2018), it can be seen that the upward trend of communication departments has slowly recovered. Thereby, regarding human resources, 56% of departments now have the same number of employees as in 2016, but staff numbers have increased in 34% of them, compared to the downsizing in some 10% of them. Compared to the roughest years of the crisis, recovery is even more evident, as the average number of employees in communication departments in 2010 was 7 people compared to 18 in 2017, an increase of 157% in only 7 years.

Regarding material resources that the different organisations allocated to communication, data are similar with 55% maintaining the same resources as the previous year, 32% increasing them, and only 13% reducing them. However, there is a new tendency from the budgetary point of view –the lowest budgets increased the most, while the percentage of the highest ones relative to the total has significantly decreased.

Apart from the mythomaniac concept of communication mentioned by Villafañe (2001), this sustained expansion is undoubtedly explained by the fact that current companies' main differentiating factor is not the quality of the products they make, all with similar standards within ranges, but the image of each organisation among its audience. For that reason, as noted by Morató (2011), communication tends to increasingly be found at the heart of the economic and business strategy of each entity. This tendency is perfectly illustrated by Zerfass, Verčič, Nothhaft and Werder (2018b, p. 487), who note that “communication can play a distinctive role in formulating, revising, presenting, executing, implementing, and putting strategies in practice.”

Hence the explanation that, despite the decrease in staff and material resources allocated to communication during the crisis, this is not the case with the qualitative importance given to it within the organisations, which increased year after year, even fed by the conviction that, particularly during times of hardship, the bid for specialisation, better trained communication managers, and their increased capacity of making strategic decisions would help overcome difficulties. “The figure of DIRCOM takes on special significance in difficult times, becoming necessary for the organisation, which in hard times intends to differentiate itself from the competence through good communicative management” (Cabrera, 2015, p. 329).

Thus, in 2014, still in the midst of economic crisis, the vast majority of communication managers (more than 83%) expressed that the emphasis given to communication inside their companies had increased, being an important or very important element for 80% of them, a figure that has not changed significantly ever since –now it is 83% (DIRCOM, 2018)– despite the favourable changes experienced from the economic point of view. Furthermore, for that very reason, during those years of budget reduction, there was, by contrast, a remarkable increase (57%) in spending aimed at measuring the results and effectiveness of communicative actions deployed by organisations (DIRCOM, 2015), ensuring in this context the realisation of the maxim –almost turned into leitmotiv during the crisis– of doing more and better with less (Puentes-Rivera, 2017).

Work specialisation and professionalisation within the departments has translated into a greater specialisation of the directors and senior managers of those departments. Therefore, nowadays, 65% of them hold postgraduate qualifications (56% masters / postgraduate course and 9% PhDs), compared to 32% in 2010 and 19% in 2005 (DIRCOM, 2018), but it is again during

times of hardship and economic crisis when this bid for specialisation and professionalisation reaches its highest degree, reaching 75% in 2014 (DIRCOM, 2014). Adding to the aforementioned numbers, 34% of those whose highest level of education is a Degree or a Licentiate, it is concluded that 99% of communication managers have higher education compared to 1% without it (DIRCOM, 2018).

It is interesting to analyse, as conducted in this article, not only the level of education, but also the concrete qualification or training of those professionals. This suggests that the Degree in Advertising and Public Relations, despite the progress in recent years, is still clearly minor (18%) compared to the pervasive Degree in Journalism and Media Studies, completed by 56% of communication managers in 2017, which continues to strengthen its leadership, as in 2014 represented 49% of the total, 35% in 2010, and 33% in 2005.

In this regard, in addition to the specialisation in communication noted by Cabrera (2015), there is an increasing demand for a profile of communication managers with academic training in business management, something consistent with the aforementioned tendency of placing the management of communication in the highest hierarchical level of the organisations and involving it in its strategic or business decisions, therefore conceiving communication as a transversal activity, an old aspiration of public relations professionals, a trend that, according to the same author (2015, p. 328) will continue rising:

In 2020, the DIRCOM's significance will increase, becoming an essential figure in every Spanish company. It will be consolidated as a department and as a strategic direction in transversal areas, having a more strategic role instead of an operational one [...]. The future DIRCOM will be a business person in service of communication.

At the same time, compared to classical training in communication, there is also value in the mastery of new communication tools, mainly based on emotional aspects, and tools measuring communication effectiveness, often resulting from the implementation of neuroscience techniques in social sciences, as “big brands no longer consider people mere consumers, but people with values, intelligence and heart” and only entities working on both aspects, mind and heart, will establish a strong relationship with their audience (Rúas-Araújo & García, 2018, p. 177).

Accordingly, the two main challenges faced by Spanish companies from a communicative point of view in the following years and, as a consequence, the abilities a communication manager must have are the use and implementation of big data and algorithms in communication (50%), as well as being able to connect the organisation's communication and general strategies (47%), which the European Communication Monitor (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič & Moreno, 2018a, p. 46) raises to the top professional concern in the case of Spain (49%), thus becoming the European country that values most this aspect after Denmark (pp. 48-49). Other especially valued issues (DIRCOM, 2018) are designing quality content (40%), internal communication (36%), supporting senior management in decision-making (34%), and building and strengthening trust in the organisation (33%).

The accurate transversal conception of communication, as previously mentioned, is consistent with the objective fact that in an organisation not only actions considered strictly communicative (advertising, graphic image or specific actions in public relations) are reported, but everything within the organisation is communicated, from the attitude and opinions of managers and employees to their products and relations with the most immediate population and social setting. Therefore, everything must be planned and executed from the communicative point of view in order to achieve the greatest possible consistency and efficiency.

From this conception of communication arises what is known as strategic communication, “communication alienated and integrated into the company's global strategy, which boosts and improves the organisation's strategic positioning,” as defined by Argenti

(2014, p. 93), to whom the steps to follow in a model of communicative management of this kind are: implementing an effective corporate strategy, analysing and identifying the main stakeholders, effectively transmitting messages, and finally, assessing the interest groups' response. Certainly, integrating corporate communication into the organisation's global vision and strategy (Puentes-Rivera, 2018), an imposed commitment from which there is no turning back despite the fact that many organisations, and especially the largest ones, maintain a work dynamic based on immediacy and on the short term (Matilla, 2014).

In line with that commitment, in 2014 –the last year for which figures are available–, the percentage of companies in which there was a comprehensive written communication plan available, linked and related to the company's general business strategy, was 52%. To that percentage could be added 23% of companies claiming to have a similar plan, though not written, which would result in 75% of Spanish companies already working with a strategic vision of communication (DIRCOM, 2015), with significant differences –as already noted in relation to other aspects– between large and small companies as, among other things, the figure of the communication manager in large companies has a long tradition, while its integration into small and medium-sized ones is recent and slow (Cabrera, 2015, p. 326).

Elsewhere in Europe, apart from Spain, there has been a similar situation for years and that need to implement strategic communication at the heart of organisations, to align the general business strategy with the communication strategy, is also the second most important challenge faced by professionals (38%), second only to the need to develop and safeguard trust relations between organisations and their audience (40%), the backbone of public relations (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič & Moreno, 2018a, p. 46).

Strategic communication therefore surpasses as a professional challenge –both in Spain and the whole of Europe– other issues extensively debated and investigated, such as the development of digital communication and social platforms, especially social networks (the main issue between 2010 and 2014), transparency, audience participation, sustainable development, or issues related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). However, such statement must not lead to assuming that issues related to digital communication in general are irrelevant, as all of them rank among the top 10 concerns of professionals and their organisations, as well as CSR, environmental aspects, or transparency and channels for the audience's effective participation.

In relation to corporate social responsibility, regardless of which ranks higher among the main challenges for the future of the profession, it is clear that “from the moment a company or institution starts working, it already has something to report or communicate and therefore begins its social duty, becoming an instrument of social dialogue” (Martín, 2006, p. 23). As pointed out by the 2015 Report on the State of Communication in Spain (DIRCOM, 2015), 4 out of 5 companies (81%) choose to develop what the study refers to as “communication with awareness,” i.e., listening to and maintaining a stable relationship with their target audiences or stakeholders, and performing their communicative work “in a transparent, responsible and truthful way.”

The main discrepancy or subject of discussion lies in the significance that traditional media will have in the future within the organisations' communication strategies, as only 37% of communication managers believe that their influence in forming a public opinion will increase, a similar percentage (26%) disagreeing with that idea and believing the opposite, i.e., that this influence will decrease. Nevertheless, most of them (50% compared to 22%) assure that the importance and influence of the organisation's own media, such as social media and web spaces, will increase until having, such as they have nowadays, an ever more relevant role (Zerfass, Verčič, Verhoeven, Moreno & Tench, 2015, p. 18).

All that involves an inexorable path towards, and the consolidation of, a two-way communication model in which, as pointed out for years, sender and receiver roles have been exchanged, and the two of them are both at the same time, in a constant question-answer

process (Uña, 2010, p. 19). It is an interactive model which not only incorporates interactivity or feedback, but that, in terms of time, is closer to the natural human model of real-time conversation. This is a model adopted by the market nowadays, one reflected in 2.0 communication departments, which have experienced a significant extension and consolidation in recent years; as noted by García-Orosa (2009, pp. 25-27), collaborative communities where participation structures are created and journalists and target audiences' feedback is promoted.

Therefore, one of the main tasks of the organisations' communication managers is "adapting to a new communicative environment, where relations are personal and highly controlled by the client. Furthermore, the company must change its philosophy of action, and therefore the communication manager must do the same" (Cabrera, 2015, p. 327).

Regarding all these changes at the heart of communication departments, Flores' contribution (2009, p. 74) on media is clarifying and could be perfectly applied to communication at the heart of all kinds of organisations:

Without facing these new challenges, big media emporiums that have existed since the last century could fall into the danger of disappearing in time. [...] Therefore, media companies desiring to be present in the world of blogs and social media must know how to adapt to these new changes and implement new rapidly emerging communication codes within their advertising strategies.

The audience's increasing role in the organisations' communication strategy, as with other areas within society, is both an opportunity to improve communicative efficiency and to establish stronger relations between them and the public, and also makes them more likely to be affected by a communication crisis to the extent that intervening agents become more numerous and companies and institutions no longer hold a monopoly on communicative relation, which implies a more prominent role or relevance of the aforementioned crisis communication plans, as it could be said that in the world there are basically two types of organisations –those that have already experienced a crisis and those that will experience one in the future (Arroyo & Yus, 2011, p. 79).

As noted by Martínez (2011, p. 9), current communicative crisis no longer concern only their creators and their sufferers, but are a collective social phenomenon in which multiple agents participate, influence and comment, favoured by the fact that everyone has something to say and have the tools and means to do it.

From the assertions made in previous paragraphs, despite the limited presence of graduates in public relations in communication departments or the explained discrepancy of their nomenclature and the very professional concept of public relations, it can only be concluded that the leading role of these professionals will increase in the future, as different studies note that non-paying communicative practices will experience greater development in the coming years, i.e., those based on personal relations, the professional collaboration or complicity with conventional media, i.e., public relations.

Accordingly, only 33% European communication departments' senior managers are betting on advertising, marketing or sponsoring as professional actions meant to gain relevance in the coming years. On the other hand, 57% are committed to free paying relations with the media, therefore based on the exchange of content or on personal relations with the press; to this percentage must be added 61% of those committed to strategic agreements with the media, such as co-producing content, publications or joint services, a tendency that is sharper in the South and the East of Europe than in the rest of the continent (Zerfass *et al.*, 2015, pp. 20 and 25).

In conclusion, as stated by Costa (2011, p. 19):

The term communication must not be understood in a merely technical or media-related sense, and neither as before, as an activity unique to advertising or public relations. Today, communication is the central nervous system governing the behaviour and the functioning of every organisation and its relations with its environment. That is why corporate communication is closely linked to strategy and management.

The disparity discussed regarding size, budget, nomenclature, functions, location within the organisational chart, etc., of communication departments which, in turn, affects the relevance and conception of public relations as professional discipline at the heart of organisations, is not an exclusively Spanish problem or debate, but several European (Zerfass *et al.*, 2018a) and international (Moss, Likely, Sriramesh & Ferrari, 2017) studies prove that the debate, with substantial differences among them, is alive in at least most Western countries.

2. Methodology

The findings presented in this article are the result of an exploratory and descriptive study with the key objective of analysing the communicative structure of the main Spanish business organisations, as well as their managers' concerns in this area.

With a fundamentally descriptive and quantitative methodology, sample was selected, comprising of 61 individuals, of the companies with the largest revenue in Spain, meaning those included in the National Business Ranking¹ carried out by *El Economista*, which compiles the 500,000 main companies according to the most recent recorded sales from several sources of information, public and private, such as the BORME (Boletín Oficial del Registro Mercantil or "Official Bulletin of the Company Register"), deposits from official accounts, the Boletín Oficial del Estado (the Spanish Official Gazette), etc.².

Data were collected between June and September 2018 through a telephone survey with probabilistic, random and simple sampling. The maximum margin of error for the indicated sample is 9.0% (2sigma).

Previously and in parallel to the field work, there has been a bibliographic extraction of the contents addressed in the study, focused on the Spanish case. Accordingly, the baseline hypothesis is that large companies in Spain have significant resources, both economic and human, to properly meet their communicative needs, which is consistent with the existence of internal departments or offices devoted to this task and highly specialised (H1). On the other hand, it is assumed that the managers of these companies are particularly concerned about aspects such as transparency and the organisation's responsibility towards their audience (H2).

A series of research objectives were designed, all related to the aforementioned hypothesis:

- O1 - Analysing the communication structure addressing the needs of these organisations.
- O2 - Studying the professional profile of those departments' senior managers.
- O3 - Learning the communicative actions and instruments externalised by those organisations.
- O4- Studying the significance that analysed companies give to aspects related to communicative values such as honesty, credibility, transparency, creativity, quality, innovation, reputation, brand identity and image and corporate social responsibility (CSR).
- O5 - Learning the value these companies give to mobile apps, big data or the support for information technologies.

¹ <http://ranking-empresas.eleconomista.es/>.

² <http://ranking-empresas.eleconomista.es/faqs.html>.

For this, the following blocks of questions were provided:

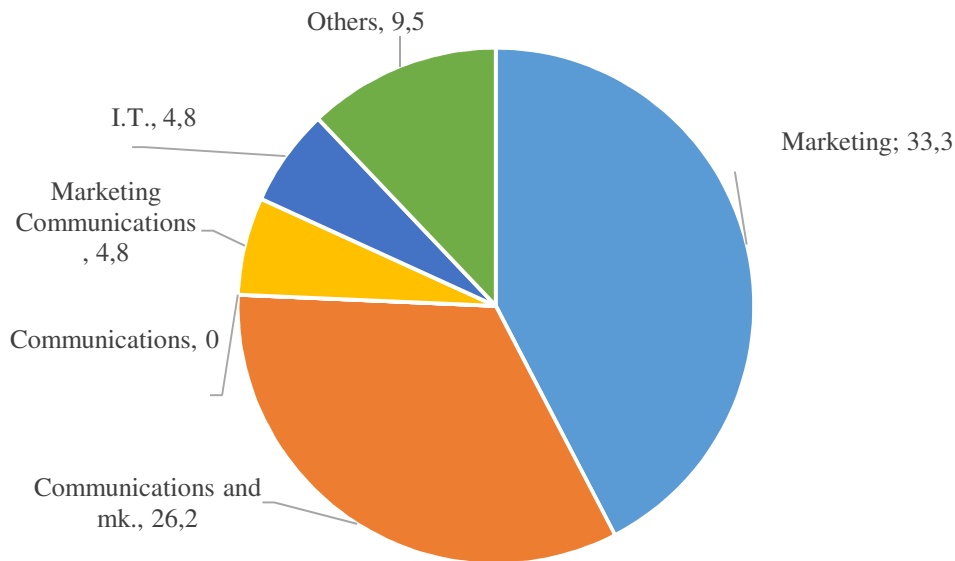
1. Identifying the companies under study: location, business sector.
2. Does your company have its own communication department/area/office? (O1). If that is the case, what nomenclature does it use? (O1), how many people are involved in the department? (O1), what is the designation of the department's manager? (O2), what is their specific training? (O2).
3. Does your company often resort to outsourcing communication services? If that is the case, for which specific areas? Where are those subcontracted companies located? (O3).
4. What is your view on the importance your company gives to the following issues related to communication: honesty, credibility, transparency, creativity, quality, innovation, reputation, brand identity and image and CSR, information technologies, mobile apps and big data? (O4 y O5).

3. Results

In order to better understand the outlined results, it must be noted that, firstly, the companies included in the sample are mostly located at the Community of Madrid (41,5%), Catalonia (17%) and the Valencian Community (15,1%), and, with a considerable gap, those located with the same representation (5.7%) in Andalusia, the Canary Islands and the Basque Country. More than the remaining 9% are distributed throughout the rest of the territory.

As for the presence of a communication department, office or area, most companies (75% of them) report having one, although the designations that can be found vary, the most repeated one being "marketing department".

Chart 1: Name given to the communication department in studied companies.



Source: Own elaboration.

The second question refers to the name of the manager, among the possible nomenclatures being: Director (68.3%), Head (17.1) or Chief (7.35). Other names, such as manager, appear on 7.3% of the cases.

Such names are accompanied by several types of labels: communication (52.3%), marketing (29.5%) or commercial (4.5%). 13.6% of surveyed companies state that their responsibility is included in names as diverse as Human Relations, press, marketing communications, hiring, etc.

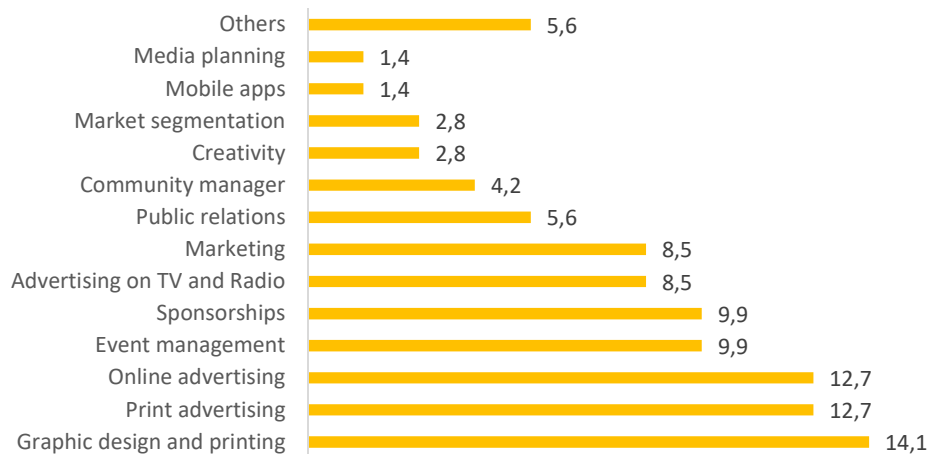
There is an average of 6 people within the department where communicative tasks are developed. 12.2% of companies claim to have 10 or more employees in such department. 34.1% have 5 or more employees, and 31.7% claim to have 2 or more. More than 7% have only one person to perform these tasks, and 14.6% did not answer this question.

Regarding the managers of this department or office, 82.5% have a licentiate or degree, 15% have a Masters, and 2.5% have a PhD.

Most of these companies resort sometimes to external agencies to perform certain services (57.1%), though it is true that a great number of them do not resort to this practice (42.9%). It should be noted that most of the companies choose agencies within the same autonomous community to quite a high degree, 87.5%.

Those resorting to other entities to develop certain services within the communication area usually do it for various activities, being the most frequent (14.1% of the cases) graphic design and printing materials, as shown by the following chart.

Chart 2: Communication actions often externalised by studied departments.

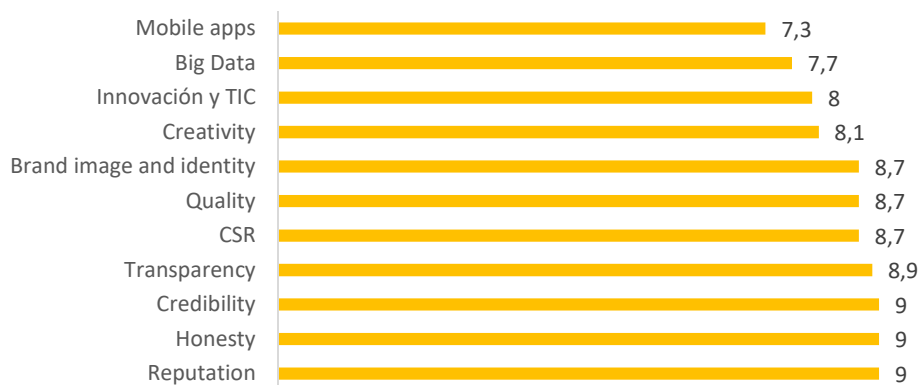


Source: Own elaboration.

As noted in the theoretical framework, the general online presence of these companies has gained importance in recent years, and especially the social media presence, in an effort to be closer to the public and the consumers. Accordingly, it was noted that analysed companies show great interest in having a corporate presence and activity in social media. The data endorsing this idea are the high degree of agreement about the significance of these channels within corporate communication strategy, with an average of 4.1 points out of 5, as well as the need to frequently update their content (4.4 points out of 5). Furthermore, most of them have several specialised professional profiles on the Web 2.0. However, almost a third of these companies have only one expert, who is usually an implementer but not a planner, either a community manager or a social media manager.

Finally, companies were asked to rate from 1 to 10 different aspects related to communication, primarily taking into account the degree of relevance given on a day-to-day basis from their point of view and focused on activities that have to face the most immediate future, which has been provided by the evaluation set out in the following graphic.

Chart 3: Rating given (from 1 to 10) to different aspects related to the current and future needs of the communication departments' work.



Source: Own elaboration.

The relevance of values such as credibility, transparency, honesty and reputation should be stressed, as they are issues to be considered by citizens and affecting their assessment of the general economic situation. The preview of the results from the CIS (Spanish Centre for Sociological Research) Barometer of September 2018³ reveals, for example, that 78% of respondents believe that the economic situation in Spain is normal or bad, something that affects the companies' image, and consumers' perception of them and their activity.

4. Conclusions

According to the results obtained through bibliographic extraction and fieldwork, the conclusions are as follows:

- The main hypothesis stated that, given the features of the population under study, these companies would have communication departments (H1). We refute this baseline hypothesis, given the existence of a high percentage (25%) of analysed companies that do not have this internal structure. This percentage would be more probable in smaller companies, but is more striking in the case of organisations with the largest revenues in Spain.
- The second hypothesis (H2) is partially refuted, as the managers of communication aspects from these companies do not show particular concern for transparency or responsibility beyond that indicated through aspects such as social corporate responsibility, corporate identity and image, or creativity. As noted in the results section of the investigation, it is striking that values so directly related to organisational reputation, such as honesty or responsibility, are not the focus of the communication managers' concerns in the medium and long term.

Regarding the proposed research objectives, we must highlight that they have all been reached, because:

- O1- We have analysed the structure of communication addressing these organisations' needs and it has been compared to previous similar studies. From their comparison, it becomes apparent that large corporations usually have specific communication departments with an average staff of 6 people. This figure is far from those gathered by other studies, such as those focused on SMEs, universities, local councils or sports organisations, cases where the number of people who are part of the team responsible for communication is much lower; for example, in the case of handball, basketball or indoor football teams, the average is of 1 or 2 employees (Fernández-Souto, Puentes-Rivera, & Vázquez-Gestal, 2018a) and, even in football clubs, from both first and second division and with significant budgets, the cases with more than 3 employees are exceptional.
- O2- We have studied the professional profile of communication managers heading these departments, emphasising their academic training and comparing it to similar studies in different areas at a Spanish level. All the aforementioned investigations agree that most communication managers hold advanced university studies, Journalism being the dominant degree in any analysed area.
- O3- We have delved into communicative actions and instruments that these organisations externalise to third parties, particularly highlighting graphic design, advertising actions and event management. This data, compared to studies produced on other Spanish companies and institutions, does not add anything new because, in general, the percentage of organisations claiming to outsource communication services and those that do not is usually similar and lies somewhere around 50%. The provided investigation does yield new data regarding the distribution of investment in subcontractors, given that almost 50% of investment (49.4%) is allocated to graphic design, print and online advertising, the creation of stands for different events and sponsorship actions.

³ http://www.cis.es/cis/openems/ES/NoticiasNovedades/InfoCIS/2018/Documentacion_3223_v2.html.

- O4- We have reflected on the importance given by analysed companies to aspects related to communicative values such as honesty, credibility, transparency, creativity, quality, innovation, reputation, brand identity and image and CSR (H2). The fieldwork results show that communication managers value these items equally, as the difference between the most and least valued is very little.
- O5- We have studied the assessment given by these companies on subjects such as mobile apps, big data or the support for information technologies and we have corroborated that these are not the most concerning issues, compared to aspects more related to intangible values such as reputation, transparency, honesty and credibility.

In this context, by way of comparison, we can recall what Aced & Lalueza (2016) noted: 25% of IBEX 35 listed companies publish content about the analysed topics on their blogs, such as corporate information, products and services information, information about the sector they belong to, and information about the activities they organise and sponsor. Any company in the Fortune 500⁴ addresses these four topics on their blogs, although 62.5% publish content about at least three of them. 5.88% of Fortune 500 companies and 3.57% of IBEX 35 listed companies publish content about all the analysed topics on Facebook: corporate information, products and services information, information about the sector they belong to, and information about the activities they organise and sponsor. One out of every four IBEX 35 listed companies and four out of every ten Fortune 500 companies publish content about three of the analysed topics.

Despite this, consumers still demand more information and do not always approve the entities' actions or information, as shown by the work produced by the Confederación de Consumidores y Usuarios (CECU, which stands for Consumers and Users Confederation) in the framework of the studies on "La Opinión y Valoración de los Consumidores sobre la Responsabilidad Social de la Empresa en España" ("Consumer Opinion and Assessment on Social Responsibility of Spanish Companies")⁵ published over the past few years and noting the evolution and improvement of different values analysed in corporate social responsibility, although there is still room for improvement in order to reach certain levels of excellency for the consumers.

We also highlight the thoughts of Pérez-Martínez & Topa (2018) on the long-standing importance given by business organisations to profit maximisation and their responsibility in the economic field. A vision that has evolved into a social compromise and has given a boost and revalued CSR, and the social implication of societies in a more realistic way, becoming a key element in large companies' strategic planning. A CSR understood as a transversal concept, the implementation of which must be consolidated in the long term and that is the responsibility of different management areas within the company, from work conditions, health protection, the fight against fraud, the involvement of the employee or consumer in the companies' mission and values, etc. The positive impact in society boosts the company's reputation and image and generates long-term value.

Finally, it must be noted that this paper has several limitations, such as the sample size, which, even if it provides statistically significant and representative results, can hamper the extrapolation of results. In this line, the authors consider amplifying the sample and increasing the number of analysed variables as future lines of research.

This article is part of the work developed within the framework of two research projects: "XESCOM: Red Internacional de Investigación de la Gestión de la Comunicación" (ED341D R2016/019), a project coordinated by the Universidade de Santiago de Compostela's Novos Medios group, with the groups IMARCA, from the Universidade de A Coruña, CP2 and BiFEGA from the Universidade de Vigo, funded by means of competitive tendering by the Consellería de Cultura, Educación y Ordenación

⁴ <http://fortune.com/fortune500>.

⁵ <https://cecu.es/publicaciones/rse2010.pdf>.

Universitaria of the Xunta de Galicia; and the R&D project “DEBATv, Debates Electorales Televisados en España: Modelos, Proceso, Diagnóstico y Propuesta” (CSO2017-83159-R) funded by the Spanish Ministry of Science, Innovation and Universities and the Spanish State Research Agency, supported by the European Union’s European Regional Development Fund (ERDF).

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