The Role of Community Manager in the Marketing Strategies of the Spanish Companies Most Active on Social Networks

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Abstract
In recent years the spread of social networks and the proliferation of users of this type of platforms have altered the ecosystem of the market. Companies today are finding that an increasing number of consumers are familiar with the use of social networks as a place to search for information and opinions on products and brands. This circumstance has inevitably influenced the companies' marketing strategies. The direct participation of clients on the websites of particular products or brands has become a vein of opportunity that companies wish to exploit and move onto their own ground. It is in this context that the figure of a company's community manager, or social network manager, has emerged. The mission of these professionals is to establish stronger links between users and the company, a relationship that is translated into business results. We consider it to be of interest to investigate how brands are managed on the networks. For this purpose we have chosen the most active companies from amongst the main Spanish advertisers identified in a recent study.
Keywords: community manager, social media, company, brand, marketing.

El papel del 'community manager' en las estrategias de marketing de las empresas con mayor actividad en las redes sociales

Resumen
En los últimos años, la difusión de las redes sociales y la proliferación de usuarios de este tipo de plataformas han variado el ecosistema del mercado. Las empresas encuentran que hoy en día cada vez más consumidores que están familiarizados con el uso de las redes sociales como lugar de consulta de información y opiniones sobre productos y marcas. Inevitablemente esta circunstancia ha influido en las estrategias de marketing de las compañías. La participación directa de los clientes en las páginas Web de productos o marcas concretas se ha convertido en un filón que las empresas desean explotar para llevarlo a su terreno. En este contexto surge la figura del community manager o gestor de redes sociales de una empresa. La misión de estos profesionales es la de lograr por parte de los usuarios una mayor vinculación con la compañía, relación que se traduzca en resultados de negocio. Consideramos de interés investigar cómo se gestionan las marcas en las redes. Para ello, hemos escogido las empresas más activas de los principales anunciantes españoles, según un estudio reciente.
Palabras clave: community manager, redes sociales, empresa, marca, marketing.

Summary: 1. Introduction. 2. Social networks as a marketing tool. 3. The figure of the community manager. 4. Profile of the community manager. 5. Methodology and object of study. 6. Results of the research. 7. Conclusion. 8. References.

1. Introduction

A mere three years ago nobody knew what a community manager was. The term for referring to the professional responsible for managing the social networks of a company or brand on Internet had not even been coined. Nowadays, not only has it become a term and an essential figure in forums related to communication and marketing, but there are also numerous courses and congresses organized around the concept of community manager. This figure arises in a context where an increasing number of users are consulting Internet in search of guidance in their shopping decisions. His or her first function consists in initiating the users into the social sphere of the community. He or she is the person who relates directly with clients and defends their rights, their options within the community and their interests. "The Community Manager is the missing link between the logotype and the users" (Martínez-Priego, 2009b, 145).

The use of the social media by companies and users is starting to become a fact today. In modern society, the mass media are key market disseminators and operate as the main vehicle for the public projection of important market events (Williamn, 2013). Some brands have managed to situate themselves as trend-setters, others operate without problem using well-applied strategies, and the majority are trying to understand how to do so in an appropriate way (Rodríguez Fernández, 2012: 20). The fact is that visibility in the social media has increasingly become an important part of the communication plan of big companies. According to data published by eMarketer, nearly 11% of total online investment in the United States for 2011 was aimed at the social media, a clear example of how many companies are able to recognize changes and rapidly adjust their competitive strategy to take advantage of them before their competitors (Wiersema, 2002; Drucker, 2006).

The unstoppable fluidity of content exchange and the consumer's avidness to obtain the greatest possible quantity of information are forcing companies to be transparent in all their proposals. "It is no longer enough to provide essential information. The consumer wants to know everything about the company and its products" (Medina, 2010: 84). What seems certain is that society is changing its consumer habits in all respects, not only when it comes to obtaining information on products and brands. A recent study by comScore[1] shows that over the last year in Spain, Germany, France

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[1] comScore, Inc. is a global leader in measuring the digital world and a reference source for information concerning online marketing. comScore has been the operator recommended by AIMC/AIB for online measurement in Spain since January 1 2012.

and the United Kingdom one in six smartphone users accessed online sales applications and websites via their mobile devices. Moreover, one in eight users shopped via their telephone. Spain is the country that shows the greatest increase in shopping using the mobile phone, with an increase of 141% with respect to May 2011 (comScore, 2012). Therefore, in this context where an increasing number of people are becoming familiar with online shopping, even via mobile devices, at any time and place, it is no surprise that companies are trying to make their popular consumer brands visible using the social networks. Good management of the social networks by companies has become one of the fundamental aims in their marketing strategies, bearing in mind that the growth in the use of social networks amongst users is undergoing constant increase. Besides, the appearance of this type of community-building platforms, like Facebook or Twitter, has boosted an interest in viral marketing (Berger and Milkman, 2012). There is perhaps no transmission of verbal nuances like the emotion and enthusiasm that can be received in face to face conversation, but that does permit the diffusion of convincing arguments on a large scale (Lovett, Peres and Shachar, 2013).

According to data obtained from the latest wave of the General Media Study (Estudio General de Medios - EGM) published in May 2013, Internet penetration reaches 64% (4% more than the previous year). If one thing can be underscored in the latest waves it is that the use of social networks achieved a notable increase up to the second wave of 2012 (with that growth appreciable even in the short period of time between the first and second waves of that year). However, the penetration achieved by the social networks in the second wave of 2012 has been maintained one year later, according to the data published by the EGM in May 2013.

According to the study *It's a Social World: Top 10 Need-to-Knows About Social Networking and Where It's Headed* published by comScore, activity on social networks is the most popular on Internet. One out of every five minutes of Internet surfing during October was dedicated to these platforms. All the social networks combined reach 82% of the population on Internet at a world level (comScore, 2011).

In recent years, the popularity of Internet as an influential technology in the consumer society has not so much been due to its adoption by companies, as to the emergence of communication platforms (Twitter, Facebook, Youtube….) where the consumers themselves are present. These websites have built around themselves communities of millions of people who are interconnected and are able to exchange information on brands, products, companies, etc. That is why, now more than ever, it seems that the secret of a good marketing strategy lies in good management of the online communities of consumers.

2. Social networks as a marketing tool

Historically, corporate communication, marketing and publicity have made use of every possible available channel in order to mediate between advertisers and potential clients, launching persuasive messages, with the aim of reaching their objectives and/or spreading their brand. But this panorama began to change when Internet started to become democratic, and it was only a question of time before the brands found a way to communicate with their clients on the social networks.

According to the study "State of Inbound Marketing Lead Generation Report", the percentage of companies that have won clients by making use of social media platforms or blogs has grown appreciably in recent years.

Today it is people who rule in the digital medium. It is the consumer who pulls the content; and it is the brand that must be present there, contextualizing its products and services, and forming part of the great conversation that takes place in real time on the Net (Rosales, 2010).

If people are employing the social networks to communicate amongst themselves, the brands do not want to be left behind, and they are joining this communication channel to be in contact with people, to form part of the conversation. What is important and desirable is for the brand to be present where the people it wishes to influence, and whose trust it wants to win, are to be found. "This is perhaps how communities managed by brands are born", which, with the objectives of taking their products and services to the user, are trying "to trap the potential client in a conversation that generates branding, and even, ideally, direct sales" (Carreras and Jareño, 2012: 37). Internet has become the perfect place for users to exchange opinions on products and brands, while at the same time it has become a highly accessible forum for those people who wish to check the benefits and faults of some product they wish to buy. "Companies are becoming aware that they have to be present in cyberspace" (Genaut et al, 2012) in order to try to condition the shopping actions of their potential consumers. The social media make users into influential people whose thematic agenda is dependent on their professional and/or personal circumstances. It is therefore not unusual to find testimonies about positive or negative experiences with brands, products or services (Martínez-Priego, 2009a, 104).

Amongst other things, the famous Cluetrain manifesto[2] states that markets are conversations involving human beings, not demographic sectors. In addition, it also makes clear that hyperlinks demolish hierarchies and that thanks to these interconnected conversations new and powerful forms of social organization and knowledge exchange are emerging.

The fact is that 27% of Spanish Internet users say they consult the social networks for help in their shopping decisions, but, in addition, the intention to buy a product or service rises by as much as 8% when someone talks about them on the social networks, as shown by a study entitled *Advertising Effectiveness: Understanding the Value of a Social Media Impression* carried out by Nielsen Online and Social Network. This research notes that the prescriptions of friends on social networks strengthens the memory of a brand by 16%, on occasion reaching 30% when it appears mentioned amongst the commentaries on the user's wall.

The marketing director of Comscore, Mike Shaw, observes that the results of a study recently published by his company offer different ideas for marketing professionals who wish to gain a better understanding of the effectiveness of their campaigns on Facebook (Comscore, 2012c). Amongst the outstanding aspects of this study we

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[2] http://www.cluetrain.com/

can mention that the marketing messages sent to a brand's fans can be widened to reach the friends of those followers, so long as they interact with the message (that is, giving it a "like", writing a commentary, sharing it, checking-in, etc.). Fashionable European brands like ASOS, H&M and Zara have the capacity to spread these marketing messages to as many as 44 friends for each fan that the brand has on Facebook. In fact, the friends of fans multiplied the probabilities of visiting the brand's website by 2.7, which demonstrates that persuasive effects can be achieved through a company's followers. Nicolas Perignon, Social Media and M-commerce Marketing Manager of La Redoute, has a clear understanding that Facebook is an important element in their marketing strategy and that "social networks can be very efficient in offering brand impressions on a large scale" and even in leading potential clients to the company's website (Comscore, 2012c).

Currently, companies are starting to become aware of the importance of being connected to this new environment and many of them are already experimenting with strategies on microblogging sites like Twitter and on social networks in general. By acceding to online communities, organizations can obtain more concrete, individual and multidimensional information. Marketing efforts are starting to be focused on developing better relations with clients (Saavedra, 2011).

3. The figure of the community manager

Behind the concept of community which we referred to above lies the psychological factor of the "sense of community" (Rosales, 2010), which, according to Dalton, Elias and Wandersman (2001), has four components: belonging to, and identification with, the community; reciprocal influence amongst the community's members; the possibility of sharing values and resources; and experiences shared amongst the community's members.

Nowadays, it is extremely important for a company to know how to manage and invigorate its communities, placing emphasis on the psychological factors that sustain them and that constitute what makes it possible to influence the behavior of the consumer from a marketing perspective.

Increasingly, companies are developing an effective model of attention that enables users to perceive the former's concern about attending to them. As online communities emerge where brands and clients directly relate to each other, the need arises for these communities to be managed (Carreras and Jareño, 2012: 37). This need prompted someone to begin to take charge of invigorating them and making them grow. The need thus emerges to create a new role, a new figure, who must dedicate time and creativity to managing the social media. At first that role was filled by enterprising individuals who adapted to the needs generated by their project:

> "In fact, the first community managers didn't know what they were. They were simply starting to dedicate time and creativity to managing something that hadn't existed until then. (…) What is interesting about this type of professionals is that they are certainly the ones who, without knowing it, have been laying the foundation of what is beginning to be studied in specialist courses or to be read about in educational books". (Carreras and Jareño, 2012: 36)

A community manager is not simply an employee in the communications and marketing department, who runs a blog, opens a page on Facebook, or updates his or her Twitter status (Saavedra, 2011). Pedro Rojas believes that "it is very important to know how to differentiate a true social media professional from an aficionado of the social networks, due to the fact that it is becoming increasingly frequent to find people who give themselves the title of community manager in their social network profiles" (Rojas, 2012: 15). According to the Spanish Association of Professionals Responsible for Community and Social Media (AERCO-PSM)[3], a community manager is the person in charge of, or responsible for, maintaining, increasing and, in a certain way, defending the relations of the company with its clients in the digital field, thanks to a knowledge of the strategic needs and proposals of the organization and the clients' interests. "He is a professional who must become the voice and ears of the product, and thus of his community. He must identify risks and opportunities, and above all, he must safeguard the online reputation of his product, brand or company through the opportunities offered by the social media platforms that are most suitable for this end" (Rodríguez, 2012b: 74). Besides, he must know how to listen using the tools available on the Net, like blogs, forums, wikis and social networks, in order to discover what the consumers are saying about the company or brand. Amongst his obligations is that of responding quickly and suitably, and transmitting that information to the appropriate areas within the company. Another of the community manager's main functions is that of connecting the client to the appropriate area of the company where necessary. In short, this is a professional who must know how to efficiently manage online corporate communication on the different digital platforms that he considers most appropriate for conversing with potential clients: a blog, a customized community, a Twitter account or a fan page on Facebook (Saavedra et al, 2011).

> "The important thing in this new organizational post is for it to be linked to the strategic plan that defining the company's global communication, for its online section to be perfectly aligned with the offline section, and for the person responsible to be in charge of participating in executing that planned strategy". (Martínez-Priego, 2009b)

We can consider the figure of a company's community manager to be the equivalent of a figure that emerged in the mass media some time ago: the social media manager. For some years, communications companies have been finding that citizen participation on the social networks has been establishing new patterns of relationship

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3 The Spanish Association of Professionals Responsible for Community and Social Media (Asociación Española de Responsables de Comunidades Online y Profesionales de Social Media [AERCO-PSM]) is a non-profit-making organization made up of professionals related to virtual communities. It was formed in 2008 on the initiative of a group of professionals motivated by the growing importance that virtual communities were starting to have in Spanish companies, and by the need to support, help and strengthen the post of community manager in these companies. Some of the aims of this association are: to represent the community manager before official organizations, academic institutions, companies or mass media, so that the latter will understand the strategic importance of this profession; and to promote, transmit and safeguard the codes of conduct that should rule every online community.

between the audience and the media. They find that the conversation that has emerged between journalism professionals and their clients, even the conversation that emerges amongst the audience itself, is a factor from which the greatest output can and must be extracted. For example, one of the flagships of the written press in Spain, the newspaper *El País*, for the first time created the figure of the social media manager in June 2010. At that time the newly created post, which was aimed at taking the newspaper closer to the reader, was an innovation. The new manager, Ana Alfageme, states that they intended to boost both the journalists' participation on the different networks, so as to take the news stories to the public, and the role that readers are increasingly playing in newspapers:

> "The readers should set the agenda more. From now onwards we aim to foment and create a community with the audience. We are not very bidirectional. That conversation between journalists and readers is the challenge we face"[4].

Thus, *El País* followed in the footsteps of *The New York Times*, which in mid-2009 had appointed Jennifer Preston, an experienced journalist and professor at the University of Colombia, to this job (that of *social media editor*). This type of strategies that involve managing the social networks have been spreading in many companies in different sectors of the market. Companies are aware that the citizens contribute opinion, clues to consumer behavior, and influence on other consumers. In the final analysis, clients that actively participate on the social networks offer information that, if it is heard and reciprocated, can help companies strengthen links of loyalty with their consumers. Virtual companies and social networks make it possible to determine what it is that is wanted by a community, fans and/or followers. Companies can see the enormous importance of having a professional in their ranks who helps them to put together a good strategy on social networks and to reach more ambitious and interesting company aims. And this is where the role of community manager comes into play.

Having a community manager in a company requires an increase in company transparency. In fact, it demands an increase in good practices in the company so as to prevent the flow of information backfiring and ending up being dangerous for the organizational reputation (Saavedra et al, 2011).

4. Profile of the community manager

The figure of the community manager did not exist five years ago and it is now one of the jobs for which there is the greatest demand. It is the position that is currently in vogue (Fuentes, 2012: 99). But what profile must a professional meet if he or she is to be dedicated to managing online communities?

Pedro Rojas states that anyone can become a community manager, for the same reasons that anyone can become a surgeon, a pilot, a lawyer or any other profession requiring specialization; what is required is a certain amount of talent and knowledge that goes beyond the simple handling of social networks and Internet (Rojas, 2011:

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4 This quotation has been taken from the news story "Ana Alfageme, responsable de medios sociales de El País", available at: http://www.elpais.com/articulo/Pantallas/Ana/Alfageme/responsable/medios/sociales/PAIS/elpepirtv/20100620elpepirtv_1/Tes

16). Since the year 2009, this position and its functions have been evolving to adapt to the real and concrete needs of different types of companies. Even today many companies are not exactly sure where to place this professional (Fuentes, 2012: 99).

Being a community manager involves understanding what strategy should be followed to build relations around the brand and maintain personal interactions with members of the community of the brand he represents (Martínez-Priego, 2009b). But, aside from the skills and attitudes that a community manager requires to suitably manage virtual communities, Pedro Rojas believes that any person who intends to work in a 2.0 setting must possess a series of individual and corporate abilities that enable him to adapt to such a changeable and complex habitat (initiative, connection, transparency management, control of time, global vision, management of uncertainty, etc.) as well as a series of desirable qualities (Rojas, 2011: 40-46):

- Experience: It is important to understand that it is not possible to obtain knowledge about social media by simply reading a manual.
- Technical skills: From a good writing style and knowledge of syntax, to the facility to produce content that provides value for generating opinions, as well as being creative and possessing good skills at communicating, arguing and expressing himself with propriety before any type of public.
- Knowledge: He must have knowledge about the communication field and a deep knowledge of the vision, aims and principles of the company he works for, as well as of its products and/or services.
- Social skills: At this point a long list of qualities comes into play, such as being a good communicator, skills of empathy and versatility, leadership ability, skill at influencing other people, being a motivator, possessing conciliatory skills, etc.

Therefore, the professional who is going to dedicate himself to managing a company's relations with its clients in an online field must have a profile that meets concrete characteristics and is associated with certain fields. According to AERCO, the following key points must be met by the profile of a community manager:

- Marketing: identifying the interests of the client and aligning them with the needs and strategies of the company.
- Good communicator: knowing how to transmit messages correctly in different directions.
- Innovation and creativity: seeking new applications that provide solutions to the problems posed.
- Technologist/Internet user: in direct contact with the world of Internet; Social Networks, Virtual Communities, Blogs and any other collaborative tool available on the Net.
- Work team manager. Depending on the dimension and activity generated by the community, it will be necessary to have a team of people or providers that will take on part of the community manager's work.
- On and offline public relations. Once the most suitable channels of communication have been detected, he must develop the necessary relations for their efficient use.

- Visionary: he must be able to detect new business opportunities and communicate them to the company.

But beyond the qualities and attitudes needed by a professional who develops his work on the social media in order to manage virtual communities, it is essential that the community manager should be able to fulfill his part in the concrete strategy that fits his company. Fundamental amongst those functions is that of collaborating "in a recurrent way in the organization of his own events, as it is proven that face-to-face meetings are the best course for closing the relational circle that is started on social networks" (Rojas, 2011: 13).

5. Methodology and object of study

This article analyzes the functions and aims covered by the figure of the social media manager in handling the online communities of 20 concrete brands. In order to select the brands studied we have taken into account a recent analysis on the social networks of the main Spanish advertisers[5] (Genaut et al; 2012). In this analysis, titled *Marcas comerciales y redes sociales en España: Posicionamiento y usos en Facebook y Twitter[Commercial brands and social networks in Spain: Positioning and customs on Facebook and Twitter]*, the three brands with the greatest national relevance in 15 sectors were studied, as well as their presence and the relevance of the contributions expressed in the profiles of these brands on Facebook and Twitter.

The cited study found that each social network and the users that follow them show different patterns of behavior and aims. The Twitter profiles of the different companies analyzed recorded a high activity in the number of contributions by customer service. Facebook, on the contrary, showed greater activity in the contributions by the users themselves, which consisted of comments of all types, in the profiles of the brands studied. It seems that Facebook is used more as a display window and as a meeting place where companies and users can exchange opinions and information; while Twitter appears to be more a platform for consultation and customer service.

Setting out from this idea of the direct conversation of clients with their brands as a customer service, we decided to study the role of the community manager of the 20 brands that have the greatest number of followers on Twitter, according to the cited analysis (Table 1).

Company	Sector	Address	Followers	Daily tweets
Iberia	Airlines	https://twitter.com/iberia	136,131	37.8
Movistar	Telephony	https://twitter.com/movistar_es	68,706	55
H & M	Fashion	https://twitter.com/hmespana	59,317	9
Coca-Cola	Drinks	https://twitter.com/CocaCola_es	51,464	11.4
Vodafone	Telephony	https://twitter.com/vodafone_es	43,756	69
Telepizza	Restaurants	https://twitter.com/telepizza_es	21,336	31

[5] The cited analysis forms part of the research project titled *Democratización de la prescripción: de las revistas de consumo a las redes sociales* (EHU11/11) funded by the Vice-rectory of Research of the UPV/EHU.

Mercedes	Cars	https://twitter.com/MBenzEspana	20,987	1.5
Yoigo	Telephony	https://twitter.com/somosyoigo	14,762	6.7
HTC	Electronics	https://twitter.com/htc_es	13,530	0.4
Nokia	Electronics	https://twitter.com/NokiaSpain	13,076	15.5
Repsol	Energy	https://twitter.com/GuiaRepsol	12,472	32
Air Europa	Airlines	https://twitter.com/AirEuropa	8,699	10.1
Banc. Sabadell	Banking	https://twitter.com/bancosabadell	8,114	25
NH	Hostelery	https://twitter.com/NH_Hoteles_es	4,795	11
Meliá	Hostelery	https://twitter.com/MeliaHotelsInt	4,765	3.2
Iberdrola	Energy	https://twitter.com/iberdrola	4,466	12
Carrefour	Dept. stores	https://twitter.com/CarrefourES	4,353	11
HP	Technology	https://twitter.com/hpespana	3,946	4
Peugeot	Cars	https://twitter.com/PeugeotES	3,589	5
VIPS	Restaurants	https://twitter.com/VIPS/	3,260	21

Table 1. Source: Elaborated by the authors

Each of the people in charge of managing social networks for these brands answered a questionnaire via email. In some cases it was necessary to contact them by telephone to clarify some basic concepts that were necessary to be able to draw the conclusions that we now present.

6. Results of the research

The professionals interviewed see themselves as managers of the social channels of the company, responsible for managing the different communities and contributing value to the organization. He or she is the figure who holds the reins of attention and communication of the company on social networks, which are a non-hostile environment for the user. He is responsible for managing the company's relations with the different interest groups in the social network field. He is usually an active person who is keen and passionate about the job; a person who connects with the public and is able to anticipate its needs and interests so as to transmit confidence.

At the VIPS company they clearly understand that the community manager must be capable of being an intermediary between the user (whether a client or not) and the brand. He or she provides them both with a voice. "He isn't the one who says what the brand thinks, he's the person who conveys what the user thinks to the brand". On the other hand, the social media manager at Iberdrola is the only one who in defining this role alludes to the community manager's condition of being a journalist or communicator. This is the "journalist or communicator", she says, "who has first-hand knowledge of the social media and at the same time is aware of the internal workings and sensibility of the organization that he or she works for".

At Vodafone, when it comes to defining the work of the community manager, the fundamental elements are stressed: "Communicating, assisting and managing/avoiding crises". At this company they think that the person responsible for networks is the perfect nexus between the company and its users. Thus, his work is determined by his

role in the company: he can be an information channel, customer service manager, marketing channel… Whatever the case, he must follow an associated strategy.

Other responsibilities that the interviewees stressed concerning the work of the community manager are:

- Communicating with precision and an understanding of the community he is addressing. Capacity to invigorate conversation and generate engagement.
- Keeping abreast of the tendencies and novelties of the blogosphere and monitoring information of interest to the company in real time.
- Entertaining, informing and interacting with the user, in representation of the brand for which he works, in an optimum way and managing to generate the spirit and image of the company.
- Adapting content to his community, knowing what they need, what they like and what concerns them, and giving this to them. Subsequently transmitting to the brand what the user is thinking or requires from the brand, in what ways it could or has to change.

Sixty-two point five percent of the community managers who responded to our questionnaire are women. On occasion, these individuals, responsible for managing the communication and virtual marketing of their companies, carry out their tasks with the support of a work group or even with support from some outside company. The academic profile of all the interviewees included higher studies. One hundred percent of them have degrees, and the majority studied a course in the field of the Communication Sciences (Journalism and Publicity). There are even two cases where we found professionals who have a double degree (concretely, Journalism and Publicity on one side; and Journalism and Political Sciences on the other).

In the majority of cases they have only a few years' experience of being in charge of a company's virtual community. Seventy-five percent of those surveyed have been doing this job for between 1 and 3 years. This is not surprising bearing in mind that the launch of company profiles on social networks is relatively recent. Iberia, for example, created its profiles in the year 2010. Since then some members of Iberia's staff combine the work of community manager with other company functions and receive help from an outside company. In this case, the outside company does state that it has between 4 and 5 years' experience carrying out such functions.

With respect to the training received by the professionals consulted for this research, 25% stated that they were self-taught and another 25% that they had done some studies related to social networks and digital journalism. It is striking that even the people who have received training by the company (the remaining 50%) state that, apart from training assistance received at work, they consider themselves to be self-taught.

There are notable differences with respect to the number of people who make up the teams managing the social media. The majority of the companies we consulted have small teams, of between one and four people, although some have teams of more than ten professionals.

Iberia, concretely, is the one with the most workers involved. In this company there are fifteen people who work on the company's virtual community and, similarly, they

have the help of all the areas of the company, which enables them to provide a suitable response to their followers. In this case, the Marketing section studies and plans the more commercial actions: promotions, competitions, offers… In the Communication section, the first thing they do every week at Iberia is to plan the content for each of the channels and languages. Thus, every day they have a road map, which can of course be altered depending on the day's events. They have a team that is constantly answering all the followers on all the channels. When this team has doubts about the answers they should give, they consult the managers and the latter tell them how to proceed.

The situation is similar in the rest of the companies. A difference is drawn between management, content, customer service and support… At Iberdrola, for example, there are three people in Corporate Social Media. Customer service has its own team, formed by another five people. The functions of the three employees dedicated to the corporate field are management and search for content, updating profiles and elaborating follow-up reports. In addition, there is a polyvalent team of writers and work is divided according to needs. But all of them understand and manage the different platforms.

At Repsol, which has more than 10 workers in this area, the functions are divided into:
• Personnel who manage the general strategy on the social channels from the company itself.
• Personnel who carry out management tasks on the social channels in the company and in communications agencies that support them.
• Personnel who develop content for the different social channels.

The majority of these companies do not consider it necessary to realize a follow-up of social networks and the virtual community twenty-four hours a day. In fact, only one of the companies consulted covered all hours, including nighttime hours. On the other hand, 85% of the companies include some type of new content on the social media when necessary, updating this every hour if required. Even so, 57% update this only once or twice a day or every three hours.

According to the community manager at VIPS, thanks to social networks clients have direct access to setting out their doubts, ideas, tastes or incidents, which makes them feel close to the brand. That transparency generates trust.

At Iberia they recognize that this presence on the networks "is the most tangible proof that behind the company logotypes there are people willing to help, which flows into the final aim of these companies: increasing their sales". Besides, thanks to this type of strategies, companies can make their products known and they employ the networks for publicizing launches more widely, which results in a strengthening of the brand image.

At Iberia they state that in this way the company's image is improved, in spite of their receiving criticisms, and they are able to obtain first-hand knowledge of users' perceptions of the company and aspects to be improved. "Not only are the social media the future, they are already the present, and they will soon have to be more relevant in the communications departments of all companies".

What is not denied by the sources consulted is that in order to be on public display a swift capacity of reaction and response is required. It is necessary to be prepared to accept criticisms and the brand must be fed with what is put on the social media. Although it is true that there are criticisms, negative comments or insults under cover of anonymity, there are few disadvantages in being on public display according to the majority of the companies consulted. Even so, at Iberia they clearly understand that "if you don't do the work well, it can backfire on you, since the virality to which the company is exposed is enormous".

With respect to the personal satisfaction derived from their work as community manager, all the professionals surveyed gave a positive evaluation. Some stressed that such intense interaction with users enriches them personally and professionally. The capacity to help people, motivation or the fact of receiving messages of thanks from users are also questions that they underlined as personal satisfactions derived from their work.

As challenges to be met, the majority stressed the difficulty of providing a response to everything that they are asked concerning the company, the capacity to generate links with users, appeasing the dissatisfied with suitable content and tone so as not to disappoint, and the complicated handling of "fakes" and false accounts. They also mentioned as challenges the dynamic of internal processes, such as communicating to the company the need to be more active, and resolving incidents.

With respect to the benefits contributed by the community manager, the survey posed a series of closed questions (Figure 1). All the survey respondents marked more than one answer. It is striking that two of the proposed answers were marked by all of the respondents: the option suggesting that the work of the social network manager benefits company image and the option affirming that he facilitates the anticipation of possible crises or problems. Both obtained 33% of the votes. The answer that received least votes, with 5%, is the option suggesting that the work of the community manager ensures impact.
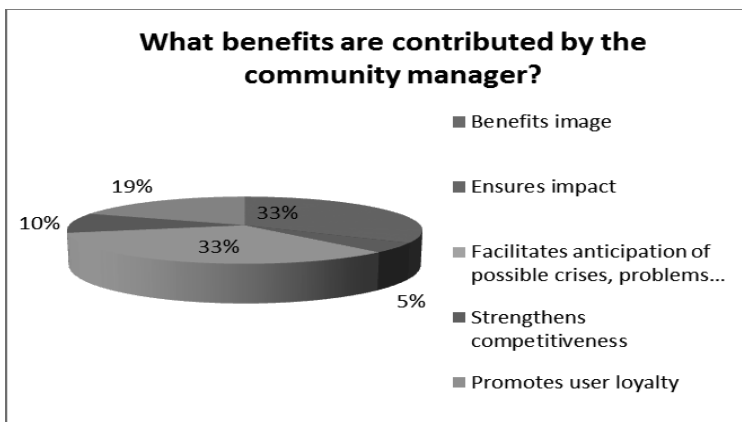

Figure 1. Source: Elaborated by the authors

Amongst the skills attributed to the community manager, the first option in Figure 2 stands out. All the survey respondents considered themselves to be empathetic and proactive communicators. This is the only answer that received everyone's vote. On the other hand, although it did not receive all the votes, the great majority considered that those responsible for social media have the ability to be creative in invigorating the community they manage. This is followed in the ranking by the capacities to learn and to detect dissatisfied and critical users. There are two options that were not marked as principal skills by any of the professionals surveyed: knowledge of online tools and mastery of SEO.
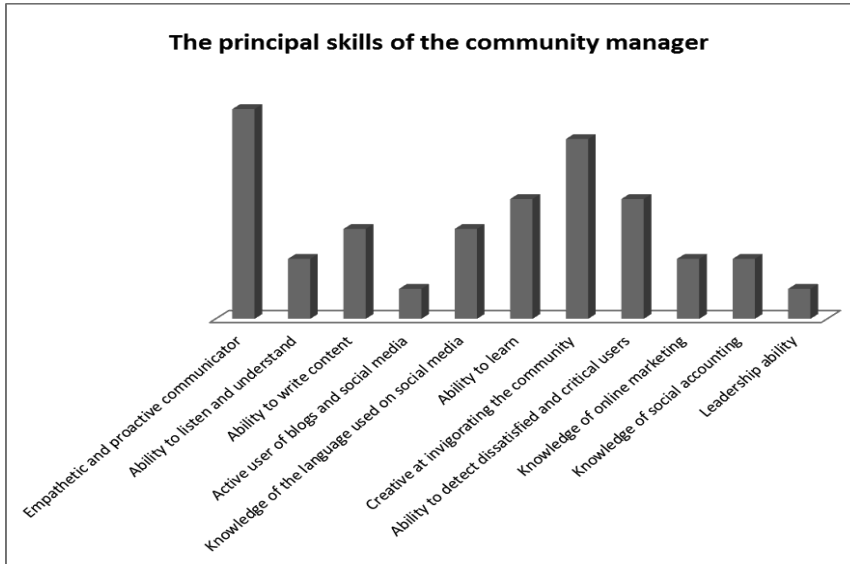

Figure 2. Source: Elaborated by the authors

Sixty-seven percent of those responsible for social media who responded carry out their work from the company they represent. The remaining 33% state that they do this both from the company and from home. The companies that only manage one social network opt for Twitter. Iberia and Iberdrola manage 7 social networks. Both coincide in the following 6 social networks: Facebook, Twitter, Youtube, Google+, LinkedIN and Flickr. Apart from these six, Iberia also has a presence on the Spanish social network Tuenti. Additionally, it has accounts on Twitter in Spanish, English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese.

On the other hand, Iberdrola also has an account on Slideshare and a blog. Over half of the professionals consulted, 67%, considered that Twitter is the most complete and efficient social network for achieving the aims set by the company or brand.

With respect to the time slot that generates most information traffic, 37% of the answers coincide on the afternoon, from approximately 15.00 until 18.00. None of the professionals consulted marked the night slot or the morning slot.

The majority of the professionals consulted for this survey agreed that their mission for the company or brand is to respond to users' complaints and suggestions, to publicize the company and to generate community and promote client loyalty. Besides, at NH Hoteles they add that their mission includes transmitting news and information that might be of interest to the user.

Half of these social network managers state that there is a company requirement to generate a minimum of content or updates each day. At Iberia they qualify this, since it is not a requirement as such. Everything depends on the current situation and the given moment. They try to contribute something new each day, but without feeling under any obligation.
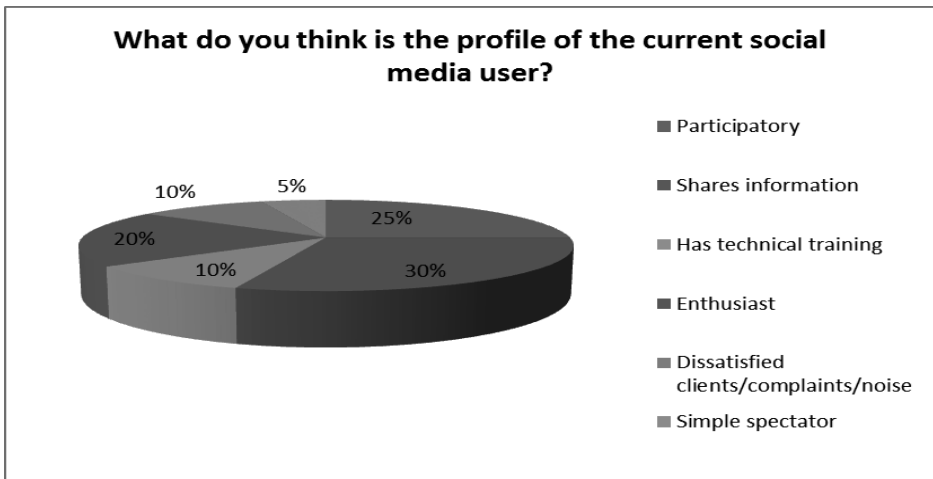

Figure 3. Source: Elaborated by the authors

With respect to the image of users held by social network managers (Figure 3), three answers stand out from the rest. According to these professionals the user profile is above all that of someone who shares information (30%), participatory (25%) and an enthusiast (20%). Some of the survey respondents (10%) consider that the user's profile is that of a person who is seeking a certain prominence for him or herself by complaining, creating noise and attempting to discredit the brand or company in question.

In Figure 4 we find a global view of the difference between a conventional mass medium and social networks in the framework of corporate communication. This type of platforms offer greater speed, interactivity and conversation than the traditional communication channels. In the second place, a positive evaluation is made of the cost of the networks compared to other options when it comes to trying position oneself in the market, carrying out publicity or being in contact with the user.
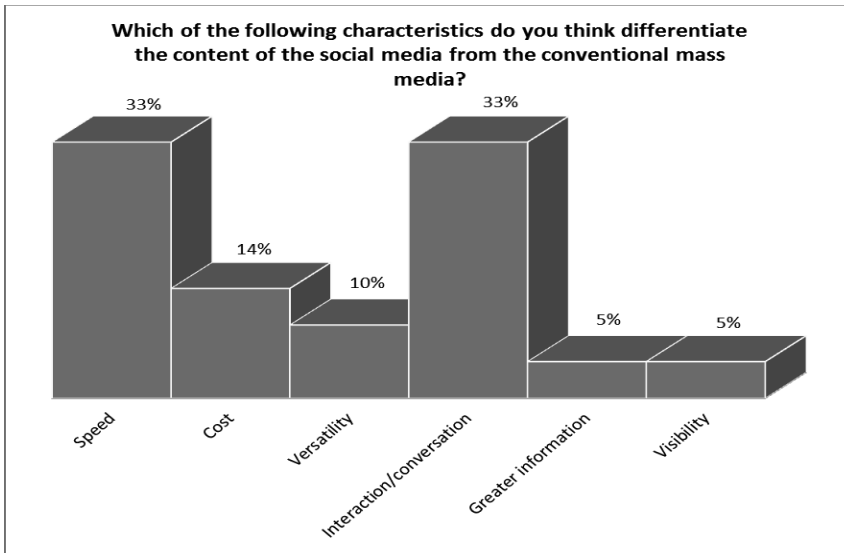
Figure 4. Source: Elaborated by the authors

On the other hand, a fear of change seems to be the chief reason why some companies have not ventured onto the social networks. This reason is followed by lack of economic or human resources and lack of awareness. With a total of 15%, some companies do not decide to take this step simply because they do not consider it to be necessary. There are now less who think that lack of awareness or lack of a competitive and creative spirit are the reasons why companies do not have a presence on the networks.

The results of this study also show that the user of social networks belonging to companies or brands seeks speed. He or she needs to see a rapid information flow, both in giving information and in its receipt. Importance is also given to feeling free to express what he wants, when he wants and how he wants, as well as to interactivity, dialogue and participation. The clients who turn to their company through the social media need to feel that they are being listened to and that they are being offered something valuable in return for a click, a visit or an opinion.

7. Conclusion

We can affirm that the public presence of companies on social networks brings more advantages than problems. With its presence in the virtual sphere each company can establish a direct and constant communication channel, as well as offer quality service, responding to doubts and questions from their followers in minimum time. They also have the opportunity to inform them of novelties that they might find useful. In this way the company establishes a direct relationship with the user, without intermediaries. They have a useful and direct information channel with the consumer.

In fact, the companies consulted preferred the social media as an essential basis for discovering the opinions of the client. According to this study, the use of social net-

works by companies and brands democratizes communication because it offers part of the control to the user. Users' conversations cannot be controlled, but the companies can take decisions based on them. Many of the managers consulted are of the opinion that influence is the foundation on which current relations are built, hence the importance of social media as a contact channel.

Without doubt, the irruption of social networks in the marketing and communication strategies of the business world has established new forms and norms of acting. These new rules of play are based on listening to and addressing criticisms as part of the learning process. Some of the people surveyed consider that part of the new process of action involves adapting to the new situation.

In short, a community manager is the person or group of people responsible for: carrying out the follow-up of a company or brand on all its social network channels; managing the information that is offered; listening and responding to the users in the shortest possible time; contributing interesting initiatives to the final consumer, and also enjoyable content, promotions, competitions… This role is usually performed by active people who are passionate about their work, who connect with the public, and who are capable of anticipating the user needs in order to generate trust. After all, this is the person who is responsible for an online community, and he or she is therefore responsible for managing the relations of the company with the interest groups in the social network field. As the community manager at NH Hoteles interviewed for this research noted, "being a community manager is a way of life".

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