Analysis of content trends and brand communication platforms in Spain

Análisis de las tendencias en contenidos y plataformas de comunicación de marca en España

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Abstract:

This research delves into the trends in content and communication platforms used by corporate and commercial brands in Spain, and also defines the management of current relations between brands and their consumers. This research has been carried out using the Delphi method, designing four panels made up of 15 experts in different topics related to the object of study. Results show that corporate brands place identity as an engine of the content they generate, and also claim that corporate social responsibility, reputation and corporate culture are areas capable of generating relevant content. Finally, the article emphasizes co-creation, dialogue with stakeholders and contact with opinion leaders, in order to create brand experiences and be recognized.

Keywords:

Communication strategies, commercial brand, corporate brand, Delphi, stakeholders.

Resumen:

Esta investigación define las tendencias de las plataformas de contenido y comunicación utilizadas por marcas corporativas y comerciales en España, así como la gestión de relaciones entre marcas y consumidores. Se ha utilizado el método Delphi con cuatro paneles compuestos por 15 expertos en diferentes temáticas relacionadas con el objeto de estudio. Los resultados muestran que las marcas corporativas colocan la identidad como un motor del contenido que generan, y afirman que la responsabilidad social corporativa, la reputación y la cultura corporativa son áreas capaces de generar contenido relevante. Destaca la co-creación, el diálogo con las partes interesadas y el contacto con los líderes de opinión, para crear experiencias de marca y ser reconocidos.

Palabras claves:

Estrategias de comunicación, marca comercial, marca corporativa, Delphi, Stakeholders.

1. Introduction: Theoretical framework

1.1. Communication strategies for corporate brands

This section is aimed at developing the concept of corporate brand, the implications of its management in respect of other intangibles, the way in which brand architecture affects communication with stakeholders, and the effect of stakeholder theory. These relationships will enable a proper approach to the purpose of this study, and justify the relationship with commercial brands.

Corporate brands add value to products and services offered by a company (Ind, 1997). Therefore, they influence how commercial brands are developed. This impact depends on the effectiveness of the management of business intangibles, brand architecture –namely, the way in which the various brands of the company interrelate– (Aaker, 2004), and their relationship with stakeholders. Prior to the explanation of these factors, it is necessary to identify the meaning of corporate brand.

Firstly, it can be stated that corporate brands represent the identity of a company: its values, vision and corporate culture (Balmer & Gray, 2003; Hatch & Schultz, 2010). This means that corporate brands express verbal and visual identity but, essentially, behaviours (Knox & Bickerton, 2003). In other words, corporate brand management conveys what a company is, and hopes to become (Schultz & de Chernatony, 2002). A good performance of the identity variables of corporate brands will favour differentiation, costs and transparency (Hulberg, 2006), thus defining future communication, platforms to be used, and the search for specific trends by the relevant departments. Thanks to its global and transversal vision, corporate

brand identity will be passed on, to a greater or lesser extent, to the company's commercial brands, which are ultimately responsible for spreading messages to consumers and other stakeholders.

Secondly, it is necessary to focus on the impact of corporate brands on the other intangibles. As is clear from the review described in the following scenarios, the relationship between behaviour (identity) and corporate communication is supported by the management of the so-called business intangibles. Corporate social responsibility (CSR), reputation or corporate culture departments generate relevant content to be conveyed to the various target audiences, and create brand promises. Consequently, managing intangibles involves integration, complementarity and brand design. The main areas are explained below: corporate reputation is "a set of collective evaluations that is evoked in different audiences by the behavior of a company and predisposes the audience towards support or resistance" (Carreras et al., 2013: 86), and involves measurement for further development of brand identity and its communication. This will help establish the most appropriate corporate communications policies, and manage the behaviour of the various departments of intangibles properly.

Corporate social responsibility (CSR) is the corporate commitment to sustainable action that companies include in their corporate strategy. It takes stakeholders into account, and seeks to create economic and social value (Lindgreen et al., 2012; Windsor, 2006; Lopez & Fornes, 2015; Lopez & Villagra, 2017). Brands play a prominent role in this area and, if a company wants to be socially responsible, it should align identity and commitments with CSR (Villagra & Lopez, 2013). This means that CSR develops sustainable actions related to corporate brand. These behaviours may be transferred to the public through the use of communication tools. Companies may put the focus of CSR actions on corporate or commercial brands. However, given the need for mainstreaming in business ethics, it is more advisable to bind CSR values to corporate brands as CSR department involves a global understanding of the corporate vision and mission (Monfort & Villagra, 2016).

Organizational culture is related to a pattern of behaviour that a group of individuals (employees) has researched, discovered or developed during its learning process to address integration and adaptation (Schein, 1984, p.3), both inside and outside the company. It will turn into a competitive advantage if it develops internal nuances that are valuable, different and difficult to imitate by other companies (Barney, 1986). Companies are more attractive when they are perceived as respectable, with good product image, or as a space that promotes a good working environment (Highhouse et al., 1999). Also, a good perception of the activity sector, profits or familiarity with the company (Cable & Graham, 2000) is key when developing corporate culture, brand identity and the way in which it is communicated to its members (Hatch & Schultz, 2003) are taken into consideration. In short, organizational culture promotes a type of behaviour amongst employees that may be communicated to stakeholders (Galbreath, 2010) and, therefore, improves brand positioning. The expected behaviour in employees will be very much in line with what the company claims to be, through its corporate brand.

Consequently, intangibles and brands provide a set of bidirectional influences. Reputation, social responsibility and corporate culture have an impact on brand management and its positioning in terms of communication. Similarly, brand identity will act as a guide for the development of each of the actions carried out by the Reputation Department (the attributes to be measured will be related to identity), the CSR Department (identity will define *responsible* values), and the

Corporate Culture Department (what is shared as member of an organization depends on the identity of the corporate brand). This is the reason why this research will take into account the influence of this set of intangibles in the communication strategies carried out by corporate brands in Spain today, with a future-oriented approach.

Thirdly, corporate brand communication is significantly limited by the company's brand architecture. This concept refers to the way in which the company's brand portfolio, the relationships established between different brands (Aaker, 2004) and the corporate brand are organized. As mentioned before, corporate brand has an influence on the communication strategies of commercial brands. Brand architecture will be the element defining the level of influence of corporate identity on the communication strategies for products and services.

Overall, brand architecture can be divided into the following strategies: 1) branded house, the same name (brand) for all services and products of the organization (Kotler & Keller, 2006), 2) endorsed brands, when an institutional brand supports all the brands of the organization with its corporate identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000a), and 3) house of brands, a strategy in which the company presents each product or commercial brand with a different name (brand) and visual identity (Aaker & Joachimsthaler, 2000b). The choice of a certain strategy will limit or enhance the company's communication strategies and relationships with stakeholders, since the communicational focus will rest on the corporate or commercial brand strategy chosen. In branded house and endorsed brand architectures, corporate brand may relevantly influence the communicative style of commercial brands, since corporate identity shapes the core of the products and services communicated.

In either case, the message of corporate brands must be consistent with their identity and should prevent generating contents that may end up "focusing exclusively on their area of activity" (Capriotti, 2007: 53). Therefore, communication should reinforce a certain image that stems from identity. Literature exposes tools and platforms for corporate brand communication, such as:

Corporate advertising (press, radio, television, cinema, outdoor advertising – advertising ads on print media, spots, billboards and monopoles, etc.) (Ortega Martinez, 1997, p.78), – or internet (built-in and floating formats, social networking, marketing e-mails or websites, etc.) (Pintado et al., 2010).

Public relations, such as internal magazines, bulletin boards, posters, events, annual reports, brochures, guided visits, publicity, congresses, conferences, contests, sponsorships inaugurations, social collaboration or social action programmes (Reinares & Calvo, 2001:25).

All these tools and platforms are aimed at communicating corporate brand actions, rooted in the creation of an image in line with corporate identity. Intangible assets are capable of generating content communicable through these means. In branded house or endorsed brand architectures, corporate brand communication reinforces the perception of products and services among consumers. However, it is found that the communication tools described are not only designed to have an impact on consumers, but to provide the brand with a multi-stakeholder vision. This means that there are other audiences for corporate brands, and that management of the relationships with stakeholders will determine what is communicated and who is the recipient, from the corporate communication standpoint.

As a result, and fourthly, it is worth mentioning that communication strategies may be limited by the relationship that the institutional brand establishes with the so-called stakeholders. Theory defines stakeholders as those groups or individuals that may affect or be affected by the achievement of the purposes of an organization (Freeman, 1984). In general, stakeholders have interests or expectations in relation to the company. Specialized literature highlights the following: material and political interests, sense of belonging, the access to information and symbolic or spiritual interests (Wartick & Wood, 1998).

Organizations, and therefore, corporate brands, must carry out a prioritization exercise that allows them to detect the stakeholders (shareholders, employees, consumers, community, suppliers, etc.) and to manage the relationships properly. That is to say, organizations and corporate brands need to know who the stakeholders are, their rationale, what their expectations are and how they understand their relationship with the company (Fernández & Bajo, 2012).

A traditional way of establishing this prioritization up until now has been through the analysis of the following attributes: ability to influence the company, legitimacy of the company-stakeholder relationship, and the urgency of their claims (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). As mentioned above, this research seeks to discover how they see the relationship process from the brand management perspective in Spain. The need for dialogue acquires great relevance as regards the management process of stakeholders. This dialogue serves to know what is expected of the company and to strengthen the identity and correct performance of the organization to increase its transparency (Colleoni, E., 2013). In the context of social media, organizations express their responsibility with dialogic process when they are available on social media platforms (Kollat & Farache, 2017).

By promoting dialogue, companies may also increase engagement. Hurst and Ihlen (2018) proposed a process of engagement: 1) ensure commitment internally (senior management, employee), 2) consider the stakeholders expectations to map responsible activities, 3) "close the loop" with stakeholders by communicating how their participation was part of the process, and 4) communicate the outcomes.

However, current studies (Illia *et al.,* 2015) have shown that, despite developing suitable spaces for dialogue, companies talk about topics that are of interest to the organization alone, and are not conducive to an open dialogue in which interest groups may clearly express their positions and expectations. Furthermore, some authors show that companies hardly use their social networks to communicate their social responsibility activities and to generate engagement with their stakeholders (Chomvilailuk & Butcher, 2018).

In short, corporate brand communication may also be limited by the ranking of their interest groups. Thus, companies with branded house architecture (one brand for all products and services) have a very large public map, since they cover all groups, and their intangibles' actions significantly influence all of them. On the other hand, companies with a branded house strategy (where the corporate brand supports commercial brands) can target communication at specific audiences (shareholders, employees, suppliers, etc.) and strengthen the impact on consumers through the communication of their commercial brands. In house-of-brand portfolios (multi-brand), corporate brands only communicate with very specific stakeholders, while commercial brands will only relate to final consumers.

This section has developed an understanding of the difficulties in terms of communication management for corporate brands. This research aims at establishing communication trends from the corporate perspective and the current state of the management of relationships with stakeholders. Thus, it is essential to carry out a review of the existing literature on communication management of commercial brands. As indicated in this section, the relationship between corporate and commercial brands is very narrow, since brand architecture and the strategy of relationships with stakeholders result in the identity of the parent brand and the work of its intangibles transferring to commercial brands in one way or another.

1.2. Communication strategies for commercial brands

Commercial brands represent an important resource for companies because they add promotional value to brands (Cohen, 1986). Thus, advertising and marketing are essential tools to publicize a brand's products and services. This is why Day and Wensley (1983) argue that suppliers may contribute to the strategic direction of the company, through the formulation and implementation of strategies at a corporate level. This makes us realize that commercial and corporate brands go hand-in-hand. This section will focus on the concept of commercial brand, and how strategic communication and the implementation of communication strategies are essential to reach target audiences, and to connect the brand with consumers. This brings us closer to the purpose of our research.

The main way in which commercial brands advertise themselves among their audiences is through communication, in particular through communication and marketing strategies. Communication is the basis of all organizations and their activities. For a long time now, researchers have emphasized the close relationship between communication and organizations. Barnard (1938/1968) explained that communication is essential for companies. But it was Weick (1979) who began showing interest in the importance of communication in organizations, arguing that companies are made up of a variety of formal and informal relationships between individuals, which must be constantly maintained. Tuñez (2012) also stressed the fact that organizations are the result of their communication strategies with the environment and with themselves. Thus, it becomes necessary to understand, plan, and develop effective communicative management.

Companies have realized the value of communication strategies and how they may convey values, emotions and feelings that lead to action. In the case of companies, strategy would be the best way to meet the business goals to be achieved (Sebastian et al., 2012).

For this reason, any organization that aims at communicating its messages effectively to meet its objectives should design a communication strategy. The steps to be taken consist of: an analysis of the current situation, defining organizational and communication objectives, identifying target audiences, giving coherence to messages, selecting the appropriate media, and determining the criteria to measure and assess the results (Alberto Pérez, 2008; Alard & Monfort, 2017).

All companies should design communication strategies to achieve their goals, although the steps may vary depending on the company designing the strategy. In any case, all must set goals before setting a strategy. Companies need to know where to start, how they are, what they are doing right or wrong, and where they are going. All this as part of the strategic behaviour of organizations. Igor Ansoff (1965) proposed a very popular four-strategy matrix: market penetration, product

development, market development and diversification. Years later, Porter (2002) defined three generic strategies so that companies can achieve competitive advantage: differentiation strategy, cost leadership strategy and the approach or segmentation strategy. Most of the companies on the market use many of these strategies to achieve differentiation between their brand and their competitors.

Strategic communication should not be confused with communication strategy, because they are not equivalent, despite the fact that commercial brands use both to reach their audiences. Strategic communication is a multidisciplinary field of knowledge defined as communication with a purpose, that organizations use to plan, execute and fulfill their general mission in relation to various internal and external stakeholders (Hallaban et al., 2007). This means that strategic communication is a part of the communication strategy, as Falkheimer (2014) confirms: it is one more element, yet necessary, for the development of the organization. However, the communication strategy involves research and it is usually designed to solve any problems that commercial brands may have. It allows seeing things as they change and is an essential guide for companies. It is important to highlight some key concepts regarding communication strategies that provide communication solutions, and ensure the effectiveness of the campaign: target audience, the problem to be solved, positioning of product, etc. (Garcia, 2001).

All these elements create the difference between good and bad, effective and ineffective, risky and traditional communication strategies. Companies should consider a business strategy that helps them achieve their competitive advantage in the market, and to this end they need to have a better understanding of consumers, competitive intelligence and trend analysis (Osler, 2003). Therefore, "in a business environment where most of the things are similar, companies with a proper communication strategy will have a decisive advantage" (Sebastian et al., 2012).

It is important to note that commercial brands need communication strategies to gain competitive advantage in the market, and to be able to reflect the insight that connects the brand with consumers. This relationship will help the commercial brand to become a part of people's lives. Nowadays, social media and new trends in digital communications allow companies to establish a conversation with audiences, especially in those industries that lend themselves more naturally to social networks, such as entertainment (Arroyo, Martín & Farfán, 2013).

In conclusion, the review of specialized literature has enabled the observation that, beyond appearances, corporate brand is understood as the purpose and aspirations of a company that add value to the entire organization, through the definition of a few behaviours that are collected in its corporate identity. The relationship between corporate and commercial brand may be more or less pronounced depending on the brand architecture of each company, since this defines the relationship of the company with all of its brands.

When corporate brand identity and its portfolio management are both well defined, the actions of intangibles and relationships with stakeholders define the creation of specific messages that will be developed by tools and communication platforms, designed to increase the visibility and reputation of the company. On the other hand, although corporate brand communication may provide support to commercial brands on branded house and endorsed brand architectures, commercial branding remains the fundamental promise for a particular audience, such as consumers. Therefore, it seems

necessary to know the steps to follow in order to design effective communication strategies, and the most popular strategies used by the brands described in the theoretical framework.

Literature on corporate and commercial brand communication is defined by the traditional tools (advertising, marketing and public relations). As a result, it seems necessary to update and delimit avant-garde strategies. Similarly, commercial brand communication has helped develop good communication strategies, to differentiate themselves in the market and achieve a competitive advantage. This is why brands are using differentiation, leadership costs, and segmentation strategies, etc. to reach their target audiences and to be able to connect with them. Companies integrate communication within their communication strategies to achieve effectiveness in their advertising campaigns, and thus associate the brand to consumers.

For this reason, it is relevant to know what the trends in each of them are, and what companies are doing now in terms of their relationships with stakeholders. These are the main objectives of this research.

2. Methodology and sample

The study consisted of selecting a group of experts who would provide their opinions about the main lines of work and innovation currently arising in brand management and the communication processes associated with them. The collection method used was the Delphi study.

According to Luna et al. (2006, p.94), this technique is deemed appropriate for forecasting studies based on the opinions of experts on a specific topic. This method was chosen because it is the most suitable for the topic under study, since qualitative techniques are considered one of the most complete to collect data such as descriptions, observations, and discussions about open questions.

As Cabero and Infante (2014, p.3) explain, the types of studies suitable for this method are those meeting some of the following features: not having sufficient information, time constraints for the participants, a certain heterogeneity among them in terms of area of expertise and of geographic location.

This technique was also chosen because it meets three important requirements for this research (Taylor & Meinhardt, 1985; Rowe & Wright, 1999, p.354) as follows:

1. Anonymity: experts do not know the identity of the other components of the panel.

2. Controlled feedback and iteration: iteration is achieved by submitting the same questionnaire several times.

3. Statistical group response: the information presented shows all the opinions of experts, indicating the degree of agreement obtained.

This justifies the appropriateness of the Delphi method for addressing the field of research analyzed because: 1) it is a topic in continuous evolution, 2) it detects key factors to learn about the latest trends related to brands, and 3) experts

provide first-hand information. In fact, Rowe and Wright (1999, p.363) argue that the Delphi method "… is very suitable for those problems where the best available information is the opinion of experts".

Following the above listed definition of the approach and purpose of the study, we selected the experts based on four different but complementary areas: academia and research (university professors and directors of Brand consultants), corporations (communication directors, CEO, reputation directors, brand and RSC directors) marketing and advertising (strategic planning directors, marketing directors and creative directors), and media and planning agencies (director of services, operations managers, heads of advertisng and marketing, and head of strategy). These heterogeneous groups of participants were acquainted with the latest trends in corporate and commercial brand communication management.

These experts participated in two questionnaires (divided into two waves). The first one took place between March 27 and April 15, 2015, during which period time was provided to the experts to answer the questions of the first survey. Panels consisted of six or seven experts in the area.

The questionnaire sent to the experts was divided into two parts. The first part dealt with corporate brand management, and the second part with commercial brand management. The basic script of the research is found below.

Table 1: Overview of the structure and contents of the first and second wave of the Delphi method applied

First wave contents	Second wave contents
Commercial brand corporate management and relationship with intangibles	
Importance of intangibles. Corporate communication and content (current and potential). Scenarios and communication platforms. Influence of stakeholders.	Platforms and specific topics for discussion with target audiences. Prioritization of audiences based on their influence on dialogue. Criteria for detecting opinion leaders. Strategies for recommendation or prescription.
Commercial management of brands and relationship with communication and consumers	
Communication trends in the brand-commercial-consumer relationship. Effects of advertising on commercial brands. Content and format in commercial brand communication. Influence of consumers on the management and creation of messages.	Platforms and specific topics for discussion with target audiences. Criteria for detecting opinion leaders. Strategies for recommendation or prescription.

Source: Own elaboration

Once the period for answering the questionnaire came to an end, the responses and number of people who had responded to the first wave of the study were analyzed. Certain drawbacks in the design were related to the detection of problems to answer some questions and some issues were too broad. This allowed for the improvement of the second questionnaire, which was sent to 26 experts. Finally, the percentage of responses provided to the first wave in each one of the subjects was high (65% participation rate), except in the panel of experts from the corporate world, as seen below:

Table 2. Panels from the first Delphi wave

PANEL 1: Academia and experts in research (5 experts)
PANEL 2: Experts from the corporate world (2 experts)
PANEL 3: Experts from the world of marketing and advertising (5 experts)
PANEL 4: Media agencies and experts on media planning (5 experts)

Source: Own elaboration

The second wave of the study was conducted from May 5 to May 21, 2015. The second questionnaire sent to the experts was carried out according to the responses obtained during the first wave and the analysis thereof. The second questionnaire consisted of six differentiated questions between corporate and commercial branding, and also collected the nuances and peculiarities gathered during the first wave (see Table 1).

The experts who replied to this second questionnaire in each of the panels were the following:

Table 3. Panels from the second Delphi wave

PANEL 1: Academics and experts in research (5 experts)
PANEL 2: Experts from the corporate world (1 experts)
PANEL 3: Experts from the world of marketing and advertising (3 experts)
PANEL 4: Media agencies and experts on media planning (4 experts)

Source: Own elaboration

Once the period for answering the second questionnaire came to end, the answers were also analyzed.

3. Results

The results shown below are divided according to the above-mentioned objectives, and the answers obtained by the experts selected for the Delphi questionnaires. The names and positions of the experts have been omitted to preserve their anonymity. For the purpose of analyzing the results, we proceeded to identify the contents and main current communication platforms for corporate (3.1) and commercial branding (3.2). We will explain how the company-brand relationship with consumers is currently understood (3.3). These points correspond with the objectives of this research and with the information provided by the participating experts.

3.1. Corporate brand: content and platforms

The theoretical framework has underlined that the identity, the actions of the intangible departments and the relationships with the stakeholders are the main drivers for the generation of corporate communication content. At the same time, it has been found that literature keeps corporate advertising and public relations as the classic corporate commu-

nication platforms. This point describes what companies are currently doing and if there are strategies different from the strategies described in the literature review.

First, we will highlight the contents conveyed by brands in terms of communication: Scholars and experts in research argue that corporate brand synthesizes the business purpose. This means that it turns behaviours into corporate values. Hence, companies should pay special attention to stakeholders through dialogue and listening, since they will be fundamental to strengthen their identity and the subsequent content of communication. This process is illustrated, in their opinion, through companies' presence in social networks, since it is a space where identity and business models must align. Consequently, they ensure that the contents that the corporate brand will convey are deeply linked with identity and this, in turn, with the insights received from dialogue and listening.

This view is shared by the group of corporate experts, as they argue that corporate brand is supported by the management of other intangibles (CSR, corporate culture, corporate communications, corporate reputation) that shape identity, and are transferred to the other stakeholders. This type of content management seeks that stakeholders not only recommend the products of the company, but also the entire organization. In other words, corporate communication also seeks to generate contents that favour word of mouth. For this group of corporate experts, the main brand ambassadors are consumers and employees and, unlike others, they highlight the importance of financial content within corporate brand communication.

The group of experts on advertising and marketing ensures that intangibles provide an emotional bond to corporate brands. They claim that this relationship can overcome the perceived benefits of the product and improve image and reputation. However, this requires substantial integration between the performance of intangibles and identity. This can be illustrated with CSR, which will only be well connected when integrated into the identity of the company. In any case, experts argue that company values are not the main element of the contents, and that "deeds" speak louder than "words", although this perspective is not always undertaken by the management. In addition, experts warn that sometimes corporate communication is "too formal". This means that it is based on messages and formats that do not arouse emotions or do not adequately convey company values.

The group of experts from media and planning agencies says that communication strategies of corporate brands in relation to consumers are very focused on selling or increasing the amount of followers and engagement.

The latter is an issue which is worth underlining since, as it has been shown, corporate brands are closely linked with purposes, behaviours and values. Issuing a commercial message as part of corporate communication contrasts with messages designed for generating trust and reputation issued to other stakeholders, such as shareholders, employees, suppliers or society. While it is true that financial strength (linked with sales) may generate trust in audiences, such as shareholders, it could also result in rejection among groups related to the sustainable values of corporate brands (NGOs, society in general, local communities).

Table 4. Corporate brand contents and platforms

Content conveyed
Based on dialogue, listening and discussions with stakeholders. In particular, consumers and employees.
Summary of the company's purpose and aspirations (identity and heart of the organization). Company values do not tend to be protagonists in the communication strategy.
They are based on the internal management of the other intangibles.
On the basis that "deeds" speak louder than "words".
Financial contents.
CSR, if it is well integrated into identity.
Financial communication.
Sometimes, it is too formal and very focused on achieving engagement.
Platforms and spaces used
Social networks. Twitter (for its immediacy), Facebook (for favouring more 'personal' content), LinkedIn (as it provides more professional content).
Websites. They express identity, relevant content and connection to corporate identity. However, it is unclear whether content is actually interesting to the audience or its role as a consultation mechanism.
Internal communication. Specialized events (that foster corporate culture), internal magazines.
Public relations. Press releases, newspaper content, advertorials (branded content).
Reports on results, institutional videos, results, studies, CSR and appointments.

Source: Own elaboration

Consequently, these results are aligned with the findings described in the theoretical framework. Corporate brand stems from company identity and business behaviours. The other intangible actions allow an emotional connection to be created to brands that companies should cherish, in addition to encouraging dialogue and listening to stakeholders. However, it is worth warning about communicational contents deprived of emotions and based, sometimes, on financial attributes.

Secondly, the platforms used for communicating corporate brand content are highlighted. As already mentioned, a novelty with respect to the review of the existing literature lies in the need for generating content that encourages word-of-mouth, that behaviours generate recommendations by others.

To achieve this, scholars and research experts argue that the platforms and topics used to reach audiences are: Twitter (for its immediacy), Facebook (which broadcasts more personal content) and LinkedIn (a professional platform). In addition, they stress the relevance of websites (to express identity and host relevant and differentiating content), specialized events (corporate culture among employees), internal magazines or contact with opinion leaders through brand experiences. The group of experts from the corporate world maintains certain similarities with the research area, since it argues that social networks occupy an important place in brand communication. However, they also insist on the need for internal communication.

The group of advertising and marketing experts ensures that the contents explained are broadcast to the target audiences through traditional and on-line platforms (i.e. Twitter, Linkedin and Slideshare). They tend use journalistic messages in printed media and advertorials in sectoral or general news publications (branded content). Corporate brands develop all their content and identity on-line (explaining values, providing reports, ensuring transparency). However, experts doubt the level of interest aroused by this information among stakeholders, and wonder if this content is regularly visited by their target audience. In other words, they doubt that this so-called transparency offered through the website is appealing at all.

The group of experts from media and planning agencies states that the platforms used by brands depend on the type of industry and environment (for example, they argue that social networks influence with shorter messages and "tend to communicate banalities"). They also claim that traditional platforms are common in corporate communication: reports of results, institutional videos, statements and studies, CSR, changes in the management board, etc. The problem is that these platforms are used with a top-down approach: "they communicate what they do, but they do not take the integration of their audience into their communications into account". This group emphasizes the following on-line platforms for corporate communication: Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Blogs or YouTube.

In general terms, the analysis of results regarding trends in tools and platforms for corporate brand communication has allowed the corroboration of the importance of identity and of intangibles in corporate communication strategies. As described, the emotional component of corporate brands is determined by the performance of the intangibles, which, in turn, should be aligned with the brand's values and goals. Social networks are particularly relevant for conveying messages, although the ways in which these messages are broadcast do not imply a rupture, in formal terms, with the traditional communication platforms analyzed within the theoretical framework. According to Ros (2009), the two most important factors for the manager in institutional communication in the digital scenario are the satisfaction and reputation that the internet environment achieves thanks to the integration of the user with the organization.

This means that there are new platforms, but the message is still delivered exclusively through the company on the basis of the performance of intangibles. New trends in communication seek the principles of participation and conversation, although it is not clear how, and argue the importance of relying on branded content to convey messages by providing value. Simultaneously, they argue that traditional platforms, such as documents, reports and corporate videos remain effective, but are transmitted in only one direction.

The information collected allows the current situation of transit between traditional communication and the type of communication that new media enable to be observed. It also corroborates the importance of identity as a key element for the performance of internal management. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that trends in the business sector barely differ from the statements provided by scholars in the various articles collected in the theoretical framework. Therefore, it seems necessary to delve into the content and platforms used by commercial brands and to try to detect if there are indeed any determining new trends or developments in the landscape of brand management and advertising.

3.2. Corporate brands: content and platforms

First, we will highlight the contents conveyed by commercial brands in terms of communication. Scholars and experts in research argue that communication with the consumer is based on the so-called advertment, i.e., the assumption of the impossibility of reaching a target audience with a one-way message, but that it is necessary to get their consent through a dissemination that involves positive experiences, namely at the point of sale and in the rest of the brand's points of contact. When using social networks, it seems necessary to follow up on the opinions arising on the web in connection with a brand, as well as the descriptions of experiences that users may read. Traditional media are still valid, provided that they can meet the brand's business objectives.

On the other hand, the group of experts from the corporate world states that commercial brands are focused on the communication of benefits in on-line and off-line media. This is so because social networks are speakers through which influence effectively grows, and brands must manage them properly to achieve trust and credibility.

The group of advertising and marketing experts agrees on highlighting that the main contents conveyed by brands are very different and depend on the sector and on what the brand wants to communicate. Most of them are related to values, satisfaction, positioning, image, price, product features, lifestyle of the target audience, etc. Experts agree that the formats most widely used are no longer the traditional ones (although they are still used). Instead, other forms of communication, such as branded content, where brands create contents to share their values and create community around the brand, are taking over.

Finally, the group of experts from media and planning agencies says, generally speaking, that advertising has an important effect on the value of commercial brands. When using the proper message and channels, it is possible to become a more attractive brand, increase recommendations and purchase intent. They claim that advertising also contributes to brand positioning. To be effective, advertising must combine on- and off-line strategies, and should have the effect that the brand has set as its goal. Along with more conventional formats such as spots, other forms of communication, more focused on content (product launches, promotions, collaborations with celebrities, etc.), and on digital formats (on line videos, e-mails, marketing, and product micro-sites) are gaining prominence.

Secondly, the platforms used for communicating commercial brand content are highlighted. According to scholars and research experts, the platforms and topics most commonly used to get closer to consumers are physical (or virtual) point of sales, which must properly represent the brand proposition. They also highlight on-line and traditional media environments. They do not reflect a specific platform or topic, but do stress the importance of focusing on ad hoc strategies that create community.

Specifically, the group of corporate experts recommends not only using social networks to reach consumers, but including a multi-platform customer service, and the incorporation of familiar characters to increase the brand's visibility and credibility.

Both the group of experts on advertising and marketing and on media and planning agencies say the main platforms that commercial brands should use to communicate with their audience are in the on-line world. Some of the platforms mentioned included Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr or Twitter. The group of advertising and marketing experts also point out some platforms linked to the mainstream media and public relations. And the group of media and planning agencies emphasizes that it is very important that brands do not go to general social networks without carrying out a prior analysis of where their potential target audience is. "The fact of having users on social networks does not mean having customers." They must address the issues that have been identified during research that interest or demand their audience.

Table 5. Commercial brand contents and platforms

Content conveyed
Benefits and benefits associated with the product.
Those delimited by the sector.
Brand values.
Positioning and brand image.
Price.
Lifestyles of the target audience.
Advertiment: audiences cannot be reached using a top-down approach, but through positive experiences that achieve "consent" of the impact received.
Platforms used
Physical point of sales reflecting brand proposition.
On-line point of sale. In addition to brand proposition, it must also provide security, availability and offers.
On-line environments. Control of opinions, comments and brand experiences that appear on the web. Objective: To build trust and credibility.
Digital formats: on-line videos, marketing e-mails, product micro-sites, sweepstakes, contests on social networks.
Social networks. Facebook, Instagram, Tumblr or Twitter are particularly popular. Alert on the prior analyses to detect potential target audiences and not having unsubstantial presence.
Branded content. Creation of content to convey values and create communities.
Traditional advertising (spot). It provides brand value, attractiveness and increases prescription and purchase intent.
Product launches.
Promotions.
Collaborations with celebrities.
Tips and tricks with products and services.

Source: Own elaboration

Our results show similarity with the authors mentioned in the theoretical framework, after verifying that the contents communicated by product brands are linked to corporate identity. It is also key to boost a proposition of sale based on objective attributes of the products but also on behaviours. This whole process of change in the way of communicating products is determined by the influence that the target audience has in commercial brand management. Now, management must be based on co-creation and on the knowledge gained through social networks. Although social networks have an important role in brand communication, it is worth mentioning internal and financial communication, as well as other communication strategies in order to reach different stakeholders. And it is important to note that the members of audiences with great influence on the dialogue created by brands in the digital realm are consumers and employees, who should be taken into account by brands in their communication strategy. In the case of modern brands, consumers not only complete the brand message, but are fundamental to it – without them, there is no message. This is the reason why consumers are the part of the audience that influences the most the dialogue initiated by brands.

The brand's communication strategy regarding consumers is very focused on selling or increasing the number of followers and engagement (specific corporate contents are not particularly highlighted). This is why the use of new channels and formats should be fostered. Consumers expect brands to listen to them and incorporate all this information to improve the relationship and establish formulas that surprise them when launching new products and services. The hard part is to interpret all this information and systematize it so that it translates into more effective strategies.

This is why it is important to give proper relevance to communication strategies, design the steps to follow, and use different strategies in the market to reach target audiences, as reflected in the theoretical framework. Thus, advertising will have a significant impact on brand value when using the message and the correct channels, as it will be able to achieve greater brand appeal, and also contribute to brand positioning. After describing the results on the questions concerning the goals linked to trends in content and platforms for corporate and commercial brand communication, we will now proceed to explain what the trends in the relationship with consumers are, since this is a relevant interest group for brands.

3.3. Trends in the relationship with consumers. The "dialogue"

Although the theoretical framework showed that corporate brands have a multi-stakeholder approach, choosing a target audience like consumers is due to the fact that both commercial and corporate brands share the interest to delve into the expectations of this type of audience, as well as the desire to know how to better communicate their actions. Understanding the various forms of dialog with other interest groups puts corporate brands under the spotlight. This research shows the common ground between both. As stated above, in branded house and endorsed brand architectures, corporate brands also relate to perceptions that awaken the communication of products or services, since corporate identity supports in greater or lesser degree commercial brand communication.

Regarding the brand, most groups maintain that it is necessary to communicate through dialog. Although conversations should take all stakeholders into account, the groups under analysis ensure that major brands listen to the opinion of consumers when creating messages, and conduct research to identify their preferences.

However, they highlight that it is very difficult to interpret this information and systematize it so that it turns into effective strategies. It is claimed that consumers expect brands to listen and incorporate information to improve their relationship, and to establish formulas that will create surprise, both in the products and in the services offered. In addition, brands must attend new social prescribers: bloggers, YouTubers or Instagrammers. Their opinions may be decisive for the promotion of products and services.

According to the data obtained from the experts in the various fields, it seems appropriate to state that the so-called dialog dominates the relationships of brands with consumers. The realization of such relationships in different spaces or strategies is explained below.

3.3.1. Prioritization of the dialog. Detection of opinion leaders

Most of the experts say that brands need to identify opinion leaders. In particular, in the new media. Corporate experts underline that the influence of opinion leaders in this environment happens in this way: users are treated as equals. These equals generate direct recommendations and trust in brands. Influencers, who are often employees and customers, reach non-customers and this extends to society. This is because, according to the experts consulted, audiences generate more content than brands themselves. The group of experts in advertising notes that audiences have always influenced brand management, but this influence is currently stronger because they can publicly express their opinion. To detect leaders, it is necessary to develop a point of view strongly focused on social networks.

In this regard, scholars and researchers underline that it is important to monitor people who have many followers in social networks, but also generate dialog, participate in socio-political and cultural discussions; and whose articles and tweets are read and get "likes" or retweets. In other words, they generate conversations and mentions. From the qualitative standpoint, it is also worth mentioning the analysis of the quality of interactions with the audience, as well as their professional profile and public performance. In the same vein, the group of experts on advertising and marketing ensures that the criterion should never be the number of followers, but their ability to convey credibility in a message.

In short, there is no total consensus among the groups, as some prefer quantitative criteria, while others favor qualitative criteria. However, it is clear that there is a growing trend of communicating through recommendations or props, which are obtained through influencers. The problem is that it is not clear how to locate them. What does seem to have more consensus is the way of approaching them. This is detailed below.

3.3.2. The role of companies: telling what is done and why it is done

In the opinion of advertising and marketing experts, it is necessary to boost selling propositions, based on objective attributes of the product and behaviours. Furthermore, corporate experts say that differentiation lies in corporate brand management, as it enables building a unique personality through values that should be communicated. It is necessary for brands to generate a model of influence that builds "beliefs shared with the entire audience". This allows the integration of commercial and corporate brands in communication.

In essence, what the groups of experts consulted say is that regardless of the channel or media used, brands should be more honest and transparent, use territories, values and topics that are interest to their audience, and secure engagement. Therefore, an honest identity is key to be able to get closer to achieving consumers' recommendations.

3.3.3. Developing dialogs. On-line platforms and quality experiences.

The way in which organizations are present on the internet involves commitment by their leaders. According to experts from media and planning agencies, the digital world entails a range of channels that turn brand advertising strategy into a more complex issue. Brands should, in their opinion, be aware of what they say, how they answer and how their audience reacts. Brands must demonstrate their ability to be closer to their customers, listen to them and identify needs and ways of living and thinking.

All groups warn that these strategies require training and knowledge on the topics that are of interest to the public. As the group of experts in media and planning agencies argue, it is not only about generating content mechanically, but integrating global communication strategies into the digital level, thus generating relevant content, able to capture the attention of a consumer increasingly saturated by advertising.

Corporate experts recommend not only social networks to reach consumers, but a multi-platform customer service, as a way to convey content and quality experiences. Most of the experts on advertising and marketing highlight that new trends in the brand-product-consumer relationship are related to the internet, but also to providing content and quality brand experience. Storydoing is underscored as a technique to share a story with actions, not discussions. According to the experts on advertising and marketing, the space that brands want to occupy in the consumers' mind is no longer defined by them, but is given by the value that they bring to people's lives.

Finally, research and academic experts say that the techniques of sending prototypes, personalizing products and inviting customers to events to enjoy brand experience are valid. Strategies such as transmedia, storytelling, etc., which offer relevant contents that promote prescription and offer useful experiences and tools, such as branded content, geo-location, personalized recommendations, etc., are also on the rise. In addition, we are also witnessing the materialization of actions such as the organization of sweepstakes and contests, viral videos, presence in blogs of influencers and their profiles from social networks, etc.

Consequently, it appears to be necessary to focus the dialog on locating leaders, demonstrate honesty and ensure a transversal world based on communication, experiences and transmedia messages to support identity or essence of the organization.

3.3.4. The consequences of dialogue. Co-creation of brands

This prior relationship management process is based on the principles of co-creation and incorporation of the knowledge provided by social networks. Dialog must therefore be based on the principles of brand co-creation and customization of products, services, or the way of communicating with each client. This means a higher segmentation and a better

adaptation of messages, not to mention originality. In other words, the flow of information does not come only from the company, but from the opinion of their audience and the content it generates. Experts agree on highlighting that consumers not only complete the brand message, but are an essential part of it. Without them, there is no message. For this reason, the previously mentioned actions (transmedia, storytelling, branded content, geo-location, customization, etc.) take on greater importance, since brands generate relevant content that promotes prescription and offers useful tools and experiences.

It is remarkable that most of the results are in close liaison with on-line communication, and a perspective closely linked to social networks. It is worth mentioning the prospects of traditional advertising, though, in spite of not producing very significant results. In this regard, experts say the weight of paid communication on brand value is diminishing and, depending on reputation, advertising may even be considered as negative. However, as corporate experts underline, business communication trends are based on a short-term approach and on the integration of means to achieve immediate impact. Therefore, advertising works efficiently in this regard for the purpose of encouraging purchases.

4. Conclusions and future research

Contents conveyed by corporate brands stem from corporate identity and the actions derived from the management of intangibles. Thus, trends in terms of content are still significantly aligned with the postulates that academic researchers have upheld for years, which have been explained in detail in the theoretical framework. The so-called dialog and listening with interest groups is deemed fundamental.

However, when defining the methodology of conversations, the participating experts are neither able to specify the phenomenon nor to stipulate the criteria that may allow the identification of opinion leaders in social media (qualitative-quantitative). Therefore, the current situation presents an opportunity for research, since the importance of listening is known but there are no clear methodologies to incorporate insights (connecting brand with consumers) in brand management.

Therefore, from the results achieved we conclude that companies have incorporated the stakeholders' theory in their discourse, but have failed to channel the theoretical approach with the practical dimension. This is because, despite developing suitable spaces for dialog, companies talk about topics that are of interest only to the organization, thus not favouring an open dialog in which groups of interest are able to express their positions clearly (Illia et al, 2015). Also, companies do not carry out a thorough analysis of the stakeholders' claims, in accordance with the principles of the main articles reviewed (Mitchell, Agle & Wood, 1997). Instead, they seek the recommendation of influencers directly, leaving most of the opinions of consumers aside. There is a need for creating dialogs, but the way to develop it is through a top-down communication approach, which favours "likes" or "retweets" but does not enable a real space in which to share concerns.

To achieve attachment to the brand, companies bet on remaining loyal to a communication style that provides value. In particular, the development of branded content. Experts mostly opt for a corporate brand communicative style that offers

content of interest to the public, in this case, through the generation of areas of interest that are not merely commercial. In any case, the use of massive use social networks, public relations, internal communication and financial communication are still common in brand management. However, websites stand out as an ideal space to convey corporate identity. Experts, nonetheless, seem to be hesitant about the interest aroused by corporate information on websites. In other words, they seem wary of the attractiveness that this may have for stakeholders.

In summary, corporate brand communication is closely linked to the performance of intangibles. Experts say that brand content should have a purpose and clear aspirations. To this end, it seems necessary to pay special attention to the development and strengthening of identity. The heart of corporate brands thrives on the actions carried out by the rest of the companies' intangibles. In other words, intangibles are in the best possible position for generating content that will be subsequently communicated. Thus, companies need "to do" and, only then, they can start to communicate their activities. Within this set of relationships, finance-related content still holds a strong position in commercial brand management.

From our results, we can state that companies have incorporated a number of principles for managing their corporate brands, based on the importance of identity, which are aligned with what the researchers have been developing in recent years. For this reason, there is a clear association between the theoretical framework and how corporate brands are behaving at content level. However, it cannot be said that business practice is ahead of academic research.

Finally, the platforms used are the ones responsible for conveying corporate content. But, in addition to the use of general social networks and the purpose of reaching influencers, nothing seems to show that the use of new media differs from what had been done with traditional advertising, namely, one-way messages supported in platforms that claim to be bi-directional.

On the other hand, contents conveyed by commercial brands to engage in conversations with consumers are based on the so-called "advertment". It is necessary to create positive experiences at the points of contact with clients, especially at the point of sale.

Business communication trends are based on a short-term approach and on the integration of means to achieve an immediate impact. Advertising works efficiently in this regard for the purpose of encouraging purchases.

It is also important to highlight that the new trends in the brand-product-consumer relationship are linked with the digital world. Storydoing is underscored as a technique to share a story with actions, not conversations. The place that brands want to occupy in the consumer's mind is no longer defined by them, but is given by the value that they bring to people's lives. It can be concluded that, in order to achieve recommendations by their audience, brands should be more honest and transparent.

The major platforms used by commercial brands to dialog with their audiences are related, for the most part, to the online world. But there are some others related to mass media, public relations and physical points of sale. Opinions about brands must be controlled on social networks, as well as the descriptions of experiences read by other users, because they have become the place where citizens appear as advocates or opponents for brands.

The main conclusion, with regards to trends in relation to consumers, lies in the need for promoting dialog with stakeholders and the large number of options that this strategy will have both for corporate and commercial brands. It is noted that the concern about deeds and words is a constant issue in all matters relating to corporate brand management.

A particularly interesting aspect is the dichotomy between wanting to talk but not finding appropriate ways to do so. Therefore, the need to define how to talk to stakeholders is essential for the future and for articulating a sound identity management, in order to develop actions that reach stakeholders through messages that often become viral through social networks, and through the so-called influencers or new opinion leaders. This has fostered the emergence of initiatives such as storytelling, advertment or the use of Facebook, Twitter or Instagram to speak to their audiences. One of the most important aspects found in our research is that the method for detecting opinion leaders in social networks is still under construction. There is no consensus on which variables are most important when trying to recognize a relevant individual in social networks. Some experts advocate for qualitative criteria and others for quantitative criteria (followers, likes, retweets, etc.).

Beyond the communication strategies necessary for achieving effective communication, gaining competitive advantage and brand differentiation in the market, most experts advocate for brand management systems that take their audience into account. This listening strategy should not only be translated into the future of the brand, but in the management of other intangibles. Ideas such as co-creation, dialogue with stakeholders and contact with opinion leaders focus on brand experience, with the idea of going from "being" to "being recognized". The flow of information comes not only from the company, but from the opinion of their audience and the content they generate.

The study provides a series of reflections and important issues to be considered on corporate and commercial brands. These include: content and communication platforms used by brands, and the relationship established by companies with consumers. Future research should consider some of these ideas to allow a more in-depth knowledge of what audiences want and need, and what brands offer. This means finding the link between brands and consumers.

The results facilitate several lines of future research to be analyzed in the new studies:

- Platforms and measurements of dialogue with stakeholders. This is relevant in order to know which platforms the brands use and how they analyze these data considering the importance given to the conversation to obtain some insights.

- Analysis and identification of leaders of opinion in the new media. These leaders have become influencers whose impacts on brands should be analyzed. Qualitative and quantitative techniques provide knowledge but it is timely to effectively measure their influence in new media.

- Integration of the brand experience in new media and strategies, such as: storytelling and advergaming. The relevance of storydoing is emphasized, a strategy that is used in brand experiences, and its analysis through new communication formats.

- Management models that integrate brand identity in online environments. The research highlights the need to involve senior management in the representation of the company in social networks and online conversations. Thus, it is necessary to know how to integrate the reality of the brand management department, beyond the use of outsourcing and the responsibility of the community manager.

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