

Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 Agenda in Spain: an analysis of the effects of communication campaigns and public knowledge

Los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible y la Agenda 2030 en España: análisis de los efectos de las campañas de comunicación y del conocimiento de la población



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Abstract:

In 2015, the United Nations announced the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda, which is a plan aimed at improving the lives of people worldwide, and protecting our planet as well. In 2018, the Spanish government made a commitment to ensuring that the country's entire population would be aware of this initiative by 2020. The aim of this research is to measure the effectiveness of the communication campaigns focused on this issue, which were carried out between 2015 and 2022, and to discover the characteristics of the profiles who have very limited knowledge about this issue, as well as those who have expert knowledge, along with the channels that have been the leaders in disseminating this information. The methodology is based on a survey of a representative sample of the Spanish population (n=400). The key findings show that the majority of citizens say they have very little knowledge about the issue. Furthermore, although the diffusion

Resumen:

En 2015, Naciones Unidas promulgó los Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) y la Agenda 2030, un plan de acción orientado a mejorar la vida de las personas y del propio planeta. El Gobierno de España adquirió en 2018 el compromiso de que, en 2020, el 100% de la población del país conocería esta iniciativa. El objetivo de esta investigación es medir la eficacia de las campañas de comunicación sobre este tema realizadas entre 2015 y 2022, detectando las características de los perfiles que saben poco y mucho sobre esta cuestión, y también qué canales lideran su difusión. La metodología se ha basado en la realización de una encuesta a una muestra representativa de la población española (n=400). Los principales resultados muestran que la mayoría de la ciudadanía admite un conocimiento muy bajo. También que la recurrencia en los canales de difusión es muy baja, pese a que admite un mayor conocimiento a través de los medios de comunicación y la publicidad institucional, frente a

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frequency on dissemination channels is very low, the interviewees admit to having gained more knowledge through the mass media and institutional advertising than through social networks and corporate communication. In conclusion, it has been confirmed that the campaigns carried out to date have proven to be ineffective and/or insufficient.

Keywords:

SDGs: 2030 Agenda; UN; communication campaigns; knowledge.

las redes sociales y la comunicación de las empresas. Como conclusión, se corrobora que las campañas realizadas hasta la fecha han resultado no ser eficaces y/o han sido insuficientes.

Palabras clave:

ODS; Agenda 2030; ONU; campañas de comunicación; conocimiento.

1. Introduction

On the 25th of September, 2015, the United Nations approved the so-called SDGs, a global action plan that was endorsed by all 193 member states of the UN. The initiative consists of 17 goals and 169 interrelated objectives that incorporate major global challenges for improving the situation of humanity, such as ending all forms of poverty worldwide, reducing inequality within and between countries, and making cities more inclusive, safer, more resilient, and sustainable, to cite a few examples (UN, 2015a).

The SDGs are part of the *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*, which defines the major courses of action that must be adhered to in creating public policies of development and international cooperation for the next fifteen years (UN, 2015b). Since their announcement, there have been diverse opinions regarding the usefulness of the SDGs, as well as the realistic possibility of achieving these goals by the deadline accorded by the UN, which is the year 2030.

In the final document of the Rio+20 UN Summit on Sustainable Development, held in Rio de Janeiro in June of 2012 (three years before the SDGs were approved), the United Nations itself made a commitment to ensuring that the goals would be action-oriented, concise, and easy to report (UN, 2012). Nevertheless, some studies have criticised the language used in the SDGs and how they have been communicated.

To cite a few examples, a scientific report by the International Council for Science (ICSU), in collaboration with the International Social Science Council (ISSC), argues that the SDGs are too repetitive and rely too much on vague, qualitative language, rather than strong, measurable, deadline-driven quantitative targets (ICSU and ISSC, 2015). Following this theory, Gómez-Gil (2018) highlights “the extraordinarily weak, vague and imprecise vocabulary with which objectives and goals have been deliberately drafted, thereby making their achievement difficult- (p. 113). Moreover, despite their aim of building a better world, these targets are full of rhetoric, political cynicism, and technical incoherence.

With regard to the role of public knowledge in achieving the goals, Easterly (2015) questions why large-scale action plans such as the SDGs do not actually result in action being taken, asserting that society must first become familiar with them and know that they exist before anything can be done. He also mentions that practitioners living inside the sustainable development bubble think that the 2030 Agenda has captured everyone’s attention, when just the opposite is true.

With regard to the originality, or novelty, of the SDGs, Gómez-Gil (2018) asserts the incorrectness of calling it “the most innovative Development Agenda ever designed, considering the fact that many of its fundamental objectives and goals have emanated from international agreements, summits, and conferences established years ago and systematically unfulfilled” (pp. 111-112). One of the agreements to which he refers is the approval in 2000, by the United Nations, of the Millennium Declaration and, a year later, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with 2015 as the target date (Sanahuja and Tezanos-Vázquez, 2017). The content of the MDGs, unlike the SDGs, was more focused on ending poverty. Regarding the previous goals, Kroll (2015) suggests that “from the perspective of high-income countries, if the MDGs were the telescope through which they looked at the developing world, the SDGs are the mirror in which they see their own policies and performance reflected” (p. 4).

Cummings et al. (2018) conclude that the SDGs represent a politically powerful central discourse and imaginary that is already being applied on a global scale. They argue that there is a mismatch between their vision and strategy, which are transformative, and their implementation and objectives, which seem to indicate business as usual. Moreover, these authors predict that the 2030 Agenda will not achieve success unless the transforming power of knowledge is harnessed in implementing the SDGs. To this end, they point out that there are certain opportunities for some groups to raise their voice in terms of discourse, narratives, and arguments, thereby taking an active role in putting the SDGs into effect.

Regarding this increased participation, in recent years some companies have been using the values of sustainability, sustainable development, or the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, among others, to create a respectable image for themselves, offering a portrayal that is very different from that which is real. This phenomenon is known as washing, which takes many forms (Luna-García et al., 2022). Numerous studies have analysed this superficial use of the aforementioned concept. For example, Ruiz-Blanco et al. (2022) have analysed one of the aspects of this practice, known as greenwashing, which they define as “the difference between what companies say they do, or the discourse component, and what they actually do, which is the action component”. These authors also indicate that many companies engage in this practice because “the general public is currently highly sensitive to environmental issues, and environmental issues put a lot of pressure on companies” (p. 4,040).

The English platform ESGgen has analysed another aspect of washing, which is SDG washing, or bluewashing, referring to the blue colour of the UN flag. The platform defines it as a form of greenwashing that consists of marketing carried out by companies and organisations to deliberately take advantage of the SDGs, in which they advocate certain responsible practices that they do not actually carry out (ESGgen, 2022). Regarding this concept, Heras-Saizarbitoria et al. (2022) argue that most organisations make a superficial commitment to SDGs, reporting very limited information on specific indicators: “In most cases, the SDGs are only used to add colour and icons to reports”. Ultimately, these stances try to prevent SDGs and sustainability from experiencing an upsurge and becoming trendy terms (ElAlfy et al., 2020).

Given this context, the overall objective of the present research is to measure citizens' perception of their own knowledge of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, by conducting a survey of a representative sample of the Spanish population, and by observing the general effects of the communication campaigns carried out to date. In addition, based on the overall objective, the following specific objectives are proposed:

SO1: Detect patterns of information consumption and socio-demographic aspects of the Spanish population according to their level of knowledge of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

SO2: Determine the level of knowledge of SDGs and the 2030 Agenda among the Spanish population in the following channels: media, social networks, institutional communication and publicity by key public administrations, and corporate communication.

SO3: Gain knowledge regarding the opinion of the Spanish population regarding the fulfilment of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, as well as their point of view on aspects related to the communication and dissemination of this action plan.

2. Literature review

2.1. Knowledge of the SDGs at the international level

On the official website of the SDGs, the United Nations states that “to achieve these goals, everyone needs to do their part: governments, the private sector, society in general, and people like you” (UN, 2015a), calling on citizens to play a leading role in implementing this plan of action. However, despite the fact that more than seven years have passed since the SDGs were approved, numerous studies and surveys indicate a high level of ignorance among the world’s population regarding the goals.

DevCom, which is the communication network of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), conducted a comparison of several surveys using various methodologies in diverse countries just two years after the SDGs were enacted. Its key findings confirm that on the one hand, 35-45% of the people had heard of the SDGs, yet on the other hand, awareness of the goals did not necessarily imply knowledge (The SDG Communicator, 2017).

A 2017 survey in Brazil revealed that 49% of the country’s population did not know what the SDGs were; 38% had heard of them but did not know much about them (a percentage in line with the trend observed by DevCom); 10% said they had some knowledge about the goals; and only 1% said they knew a lot about them (Rede Conhecimento Social, 2018).

Moreover, the French portal known as Focus 2030 recently carried out research based on an international survey. In comparing the level of knowledge of SDGs in four industrialised countries, it found that only 10% of the people in France, 9% in Germany and the United States, and 7% in the United Kingdom had heard or read something about the goals and had some knowledge about them (Focus 2030, 2023).

In contrast to these studies, which indicated a low level of public awareness of the SDGs, other sources point to higher levels of awareness. A survey by the World Economic Forum asserts that 74% of all people worldwide have some knowledge of the SDGs. Looking at individual countries, the organisation highlights the high degree of familiarity with these goals in Turkey (92%) and China (90%), compared to countries with a low level of knowledge, such as Great Britain and Japan (49% in both cases). According to this organisation, 80% of the population of Spain have some knowledge, yet only 5% are very familiar with the goals.

With regard to China, research carried out by Guan et al. (2019) involving five cities in the Asian country shows unusually strong support for the SDGs among its population at the rate of 88%. Moreover, with regard to the vital role played by having knowledge of SDGs, the study notes that it is “crucially important in building public support” (p. 14).

Finally, using the study of a specific age group as an example, AIESEC International (2020) highlights the high level of knowledge that young people have about the SDGs, which reaches 73.6% of the 57,480 people surveyed from 157 countries, with an average

age of around 25 years. It emphasises that their main sources of knowledge about the goals are universities and social networks, and their confidence level that the SDGs will be achieved is 6.5 out of 10.

2.2. Knowledge regarding the SDGs in Spain

In Spain, the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda experienced a certain lack of institutional support as soon as they were approved by the UN, unlike other countries, which started to implement them in their respective public policies immediately. Gómez-Gil (2018) comments on this point:

Spain should be mentioned as an exception, due to its passivity, abandonment and obvious negligence being displayed once again toward the SDGs, as it did with the MDGs. Since the approval of the 2030 Agenda, Spain has not launched a single initiative, unlike most of the world's governments. Not even on institutional websites regarding Spanish collaboration is there any official document related to the SDGs, nor has it approved any strategy, entity, or programme linked to the goals (p. 115).

On the other hand, Gracia de Rentería et al. (2019), consider that “the SDGs have had a strong impact and visibility in Spain since they were adopted in 2015, and especially during 2018”. Likewise, they add that Spain is in a good position in some rankings that measure implementation of the goals, such as the SDG Index and Dashboards 2018, prepared by the SDSN. In that year, Spain ranked 25th out of 156 countries (Sachs et al., 2018), and in the current 2023 ranking it has climbed to 16th out of 166 (Sachs et al., 2023).

In 2018, the Council of Ministers of Spain approved the so-called *Plan de acción para la implementación de la agenda 2030: hacia una estrategia española de desarrollo sostenible* (action plan for implementation of the 2030 Agenda: Spain's strategy for sustainable development), which established the objective that by 2020, 100% of Spanish citizens would know about the 2030 Agenda, and would be aware of the scope of transformation it entails. This plan emphasises that knowledge among the population, accompanied by awareness-raising in society, are essential in fulfilling the 2030 Agenda. The government also made a commitment to reaching “an agreement for the communication of the 2030 Agenda among all public administrations, private actors, and civilians as well” (Government of Spain, 2018, p. 148). Among the measures established, two stand out: one is to develop a joint communication plan with the appropriate monitoring mechanisms; the other is to carry out of a periodic study on the knowledge and public attitudes of Spanish citizens and institutions related to the 2030 Agenda, the SDGs, and sustainable development. The plan also ensures the following:

Coordination of the respective communication plans and actions of local governments, companies, NGOs, and the Spanish government focused on creating a Communication Agreement of the 2030 Agenda, in order to mobilise all media, spaces, and communication channels in a coherent manner, is capable of having a powerful impact. By respecting the diversity and creativity of each actor, collaborative action surrounding such an Agreement will make it possible to tailor the messages, carry out joint campaigns in a coordinated way, and monitor the results (p. 149).

Specifically, in terms of monitoring results and carrying out a study that could offer a proposal similar to the aforementioned Agreement, over the last few years two barometers of the Sociological Research Centre (*CIS*) have carried out questionnaires of citizens regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. In study No. 3238 (January of 2019), the following question was asked: The Horizon 2030 Agenda is a strategic plan to promote sustainable and egalitarian development in Spain. Do you know what it is,

or have you heard about it? The figure of 10.8% of those surveyed said they knew what it was or had heard about it, while 88.7% answered no, and said it was the first time they had heard of it (CIS, 2019). More than a year later, survey No. 3292 (September of 2020), asked the same question, and the results were somewhat higher: 29.4% said they knew or had heard of the 2030 Agenda, while 70.4% said they knew nothing about it, or said it was the first time they had heard of the action plan (CIS, 2020).

Researchers Boto-Álvarez and García-Fernández (2020) acknowledge the uncertainty surrounding the true level of Spanish society's commitment to sustainability and, consequently, the prospects for success of the SDGs in Spain. They attest that progress in implementing the SDGs in the early stages was limited by the political fragmentation and instability that led to the early call for general elections in April and November of 2019. However, they also affirm that in recent years, Spain has displayed one of the highest levels of commitment to the SDGs, not only by identifying the 2030 Agenda as a new social contract, but also as a great opportunity for the country. As an example of this statement, their research mentions certain campaigns and actions taken to make the population aware of the 2030 Agenda:

In autumn of 2019, an official campaign called #ODSéate was launched to raise public awareness of SDGs in general. Since then, any institutional communication by the Spanish government, as well as social media, have been represented by the #ODSéate logo, icons, and the colour wheel emblem. This campaign is one of the measures envisioned by the aforementioned Cabinet Plan, and its very necessity proves that citizens are still not sufficiently aware of the existence of the 2030 Agenda (p. 2).

As a result of this campaign, the SDG logo has appeared on a multitude of institutional channels since its launch, with the aim of improving public awareness.

2.3. Communicating the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

Prior to approval of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the role of communication in sustainable development was addressed in various research studies. Díaz-Bordenave (1998) argued that “sustainable development depends above all on what citizens think, feel and do, and for this reason, communication is an essential tool for sustainable development” (p. 18). In fact, its importance is such that specific disciplines have even appeared that focus on this field, such as Sustainable Communication for Development and Social Change, in which the position of Servaes (2007) is noteworthy. This author defines the concept as a social process of knowledge exchange aimed at reaching a consensus for action, in which the interests, needs and capabilities of all those involved must be taken into account.

Following on from this idea, Toro and Rodríguez (2001) stressed the power of communication and social mobilisation in the construction of public goods, and added that any project or initiative “must pay special attention to communication strategies” (p. 4). Along these lines, Manfredi-Mayoral (2006) affirms the importance of having communication strategies to support sustainable development, an argument closely related to the previous thesis.

Since the announcement of the SDGs in 2015, various studies have focused on establishing diverse theories regarding the communication and dissemination of this action plan to society. Toro-Peña (2020) argues that this international roadmap gives scarce importance to communication and information processes: “The SDGs have a limited vision of communication, which is reduced to its most instrumental concept in connection with ICT” (p. 773).

How do the media disseminate information regarding the SDGs? McArthur and Zang (2018) note that international media coverage of the SDGs (and previously the MDGs) not only stands out, but it also increases in those years when international summits take place. Regarding the way in which Spanish media communicate the SDGs, Herranz and García-Caballero (2020) refer to several Spanish media campaigns, such as that of *Radio Televisión Española* entitled, *Por un Planeta Mejor* [for a better world], launched in January of 2020 by RTVE, as well as others initiated by private corporations such as *Mediaset España* and *Atresmedia*, although they were not directly linked to the SDGs. They also point out that some media specialise in social responsibility and have incorporated the SDGs into their news content on a regular basis in recent years. These include programmes such as *Corresponsables*, *Ethic*, *Diario Responsable*, *Compromiso Empresarial*, and *Cultura RSC*. In this regard, Toro-Peña (2020) considers that “journalism specialising in development has the opportunity to hold a prominent position in the framework of implementing the 2030 Agenda” (p. 771).

In the public institution domain, Benavides (2018) states that communication of the SDGs is mainly carried out through publicity on institutional channels, which this author considers “usually inadequate, outdated and probably very limited in terms of effectiveness and real benefits for citizens” (p. 52). In line with this argument, García-López (2007) had previously stated that “this is the only channel capable of awakening the civic involvement of citizens” (p. 292), although it addresses the issues disseminated from a technocratic point of view. With regard to institutional communication, he asserts that its processes “are seen as the exclusive competence of the government’s proposals through the mediation of advertising agencies” (p. 293). In addition to these ideas, it bears mentioning the socialising and educational aspects of the communication carried out by public administrations which, according to Cortés-González (2008), include the role of “introducing social change [...] and, moreover, they must use the appropriate tools to achieve such modifications” (p. 233).

In the business realm, since the enactment of the SDGs, companies have begun to use them as a framework for their sustainability reports through emerging inter-organisational processes (Williams, Whiteman and Parker, 2019), following a strategic approach to incorporate sustainability by publishing content on certain social networks about the SDGs in relation to their core business (ElAlfy et al., 2020). The SDG Observatory (2018), which assesses the progress and contributions of Spanish companies in meeting the SDGs, highlights the following comments in its first report: “For a company to be a true leader, it must support the SDGs with action and communication that are consistent” (p. 33).

Regarding the role played by social media in communicating SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, De Luca et al. (2022) conclude that in the specific case of companies, six goals appear most frequently in their communications, which are the following: creating partnerships to achieve the goals; actions directed at climate issues; reducing inequality; underwater life; life in terrestrial ecosystems; and gender equality. In addition, based on the CHAID analysis conducted in their research, these authors have found that the characteristics of the tweets published, “such as the type of content, the use of hashtags, the existence of a link, and the number of characters, as well as the type of industry and the country where the company is located, have a significant influence on stakeholders” (p. 12).

Finally, some of the main obstacles in communicating the SDGs in the current context are the following: the first is the fact that the SDGs are linked to development cooperation; the second is the broad terminology that mixes and dilutes sustainable development or social responsibility with new concepts introduced by the SDGs; the last impediment is the scattering of

proposals, data, information and reports that prevent the achievement of a global vision. For this reason, some studies maintain that communication of the SDGs must be led by cities, referring to New York, Helsinki, Bristol and Los Angeles as examples of urban centres that have made these goals visible, and whose strategic model can be exported to any other territory (García-Caballero et al., 2021).

3. Methodology

In order to achieve the objectives of this study and determine the effectiveness of the communication campaigns carried out so far regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the authors have chosen to use the survey technique, one of the most widely used research strategies (Sierra Bravo, 1991), as it collects and analyses a series of data from a sample of cases that represent a population (Casas-Angueta, Repullo-Labrador and Donado-Campos, 2003). The findings obtained through this methodology will be used to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Based on a representative sample of the Spanish population, what percentage of citizens say they have seen the logo of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda at some time?

RQ2: What are the characteristics of the populations that have the lowest and highest amount of knowledge regarding this UN-driven action plan?

RQ3: Based on a representative sample of the Spanish population, what is the diffusion frequency of communication campaigns regarding SDGs and the 2030 Agenda among the various actors responsible for disseminating this information to the public?

By using the surveys cited in section 2.2 of this article as a reference, and adapting them to both the unique aspects of this study and the Spanish casuistry as well, a survey of 17 closed questions has been designed, which can be consulted in Annex I at <https://bit.ly/odsencuesta>. According to their relationship with the specific objectives of this study, the questions can be classified into the following thematic blocks: general knowledge of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda; frequency of transmission of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in dissemination channels; and opinions regarding the diffusion of SDGs and the 2030 Agenda.

Prior to these, yet directly related to the object of study of this article, other questions were asked in order to determine the socio-demographic profiles of the population surveyed, specifically regarding gender, age, autonomous region of residence, socio-economic status, and educational level.

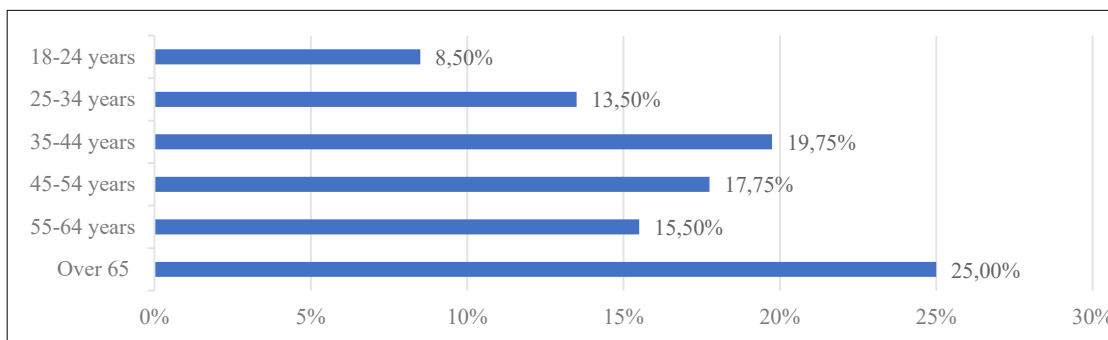
The drafting of the questions and answers was carried out with the help of two survey experts who validated the design of the survey. Moreover, before conducting a mass survey at the national level, a pilot test was performed on a small group of 25 people in order to verify the reading comprehension of the questions posed, and of the different response options as well.

Regarding the platform used to conduct the survey, the data and results presented in this article were obtained through Netquest, a worldwide data provider for social and marketing research, whose survey panel is ISO 20252 certified. Specifically, the sampling service of this platform was hired, and the steps taken were as follows: firstly, to determine the size and characteristics of the sample; next, participants were invited to answer the questionnaire in exchange for some kind of incentive; finally, the raw data was delivered for its subsequent exploitation (Netquest, 2023).

Regarding the main features of the sample design, the scope is national (Spain); the universe is the general population, aged 18-99; the size, 400 interviews; and the field period, between 12/07/2022 and 18/07/2022. Considering that the Spanish population was 47,432,805 inhabitants on 1st January 2022, according to the National Institute of Statistics (*INE*), the selected sample of 400 interviews is representative, as the minimum recommended sample size for this type of survey is 385, assuming a margin of error of 5% and a confidence level of 95%. In addition, based on the latest *INE* data, quotas of gender, age, and autonomous region have been included so that the profile of the sample is as similar as possible to the true circumstances of the Spanish population, in order to make national level affirmations.

As for the profile of those surveyed, the author has adhered to the characteristics of the Spanish population, as reflected by the latest *INE* data. According to gender, 53.75% are men and 46.25% are women. By age, the distribution of the groups can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1. Distribution by age group of the surveyed population



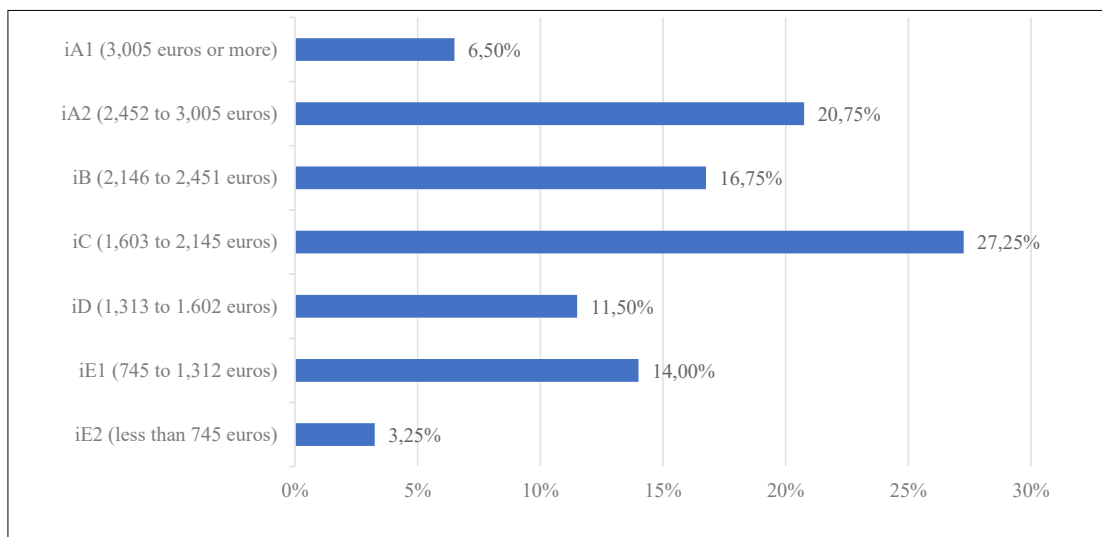
Source: created by the author

By autonomous region, the distribution is in proportion to the population of each Spanish region. By social class, the criterion applied is the new socio-demographic index proposed by the *Asociación para la Investigación de Medios de Comunicación* [association for media research] (*AIMC*), which has been used for some years now. For example, this index was used for the *Estudio General de Medios* [general media studies] (*AIMC*, 2015). Regarding this indicator, Quintas-Froufe (2018) describe it as follows:

This socio-economic index has segmented Spanish society into eight groups: IA1 is the highest income group (3,005 or more), and IE2 is the lowest (less than 745 euros). The intermediate groups are as follows: IA2 (from 2,452 to 3,005 euros), IB (from 2,146 to 2,451 euros), IC (1,603 to 2,145 euros), ID (from 1,313 to 1,602 euros) and IE1 (745 to 1,312 euros) (p. 880).

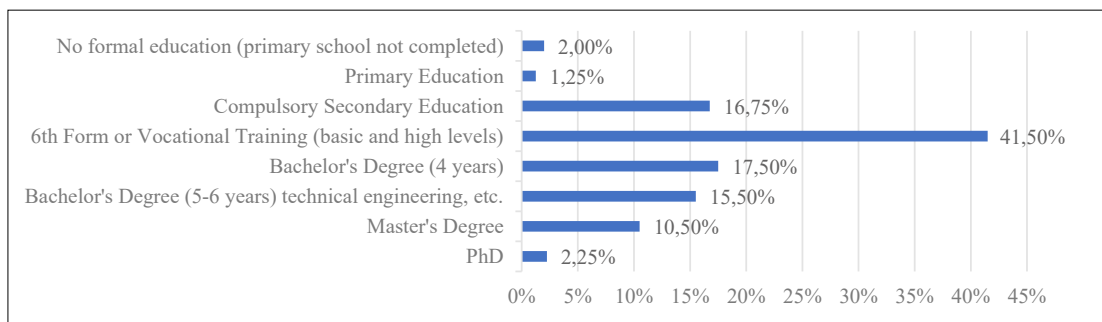
Following this classification, Figure 2 shows the surveyed population according to their level of income, listed from highest to lowest. Finally, in terms of education, the distribution is shown in Figure 3.

Figure 2. Distribution of income level of the surveyed population



Source: created by the author

Figure 3. Distribution of educational levels of the surveyed population



Source: created by the author

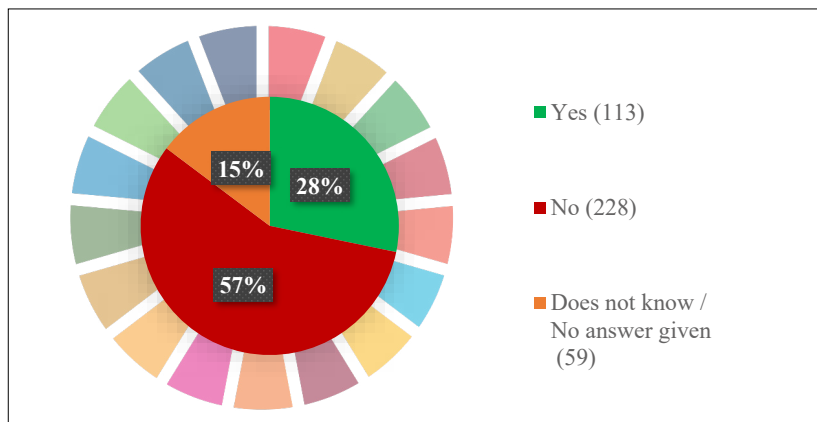
4. Analysis of the results

4.1. Results overview

4.1.1. General knowledge regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

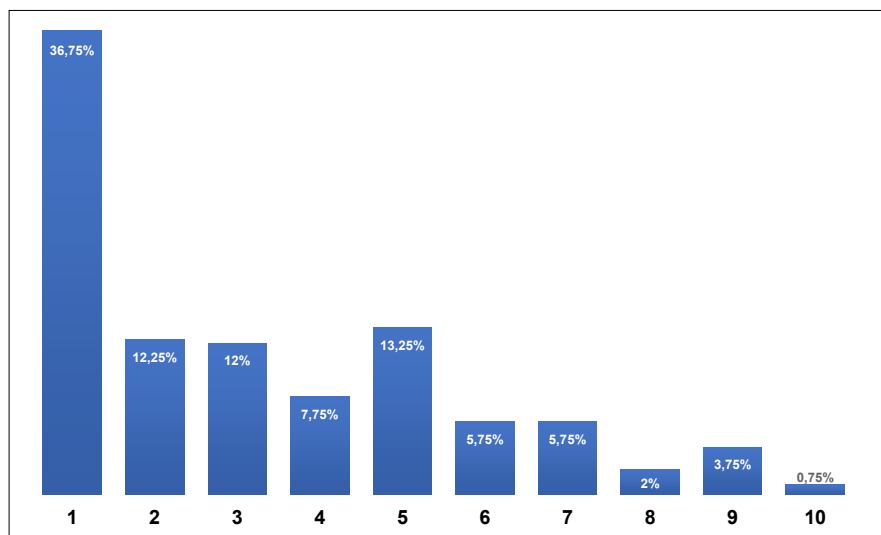
The main objective of this thematic block of questions was to quantitatively determine the general level of knowledge that the Spanish population has about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. Without referring to the specific research topic, the first question was aimed at determining the level of recognition of the SDG logo by displaying an image of the wheel-shaped emblem with the 17 colours that represent the UN initiative. In response to this question, 57% said they had never seen it, 28% said they had seen it, and 15% did not know or did not answer, as shown in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Responses to the question, “Have you ever seen the SDG logo”?



Source: created by the author

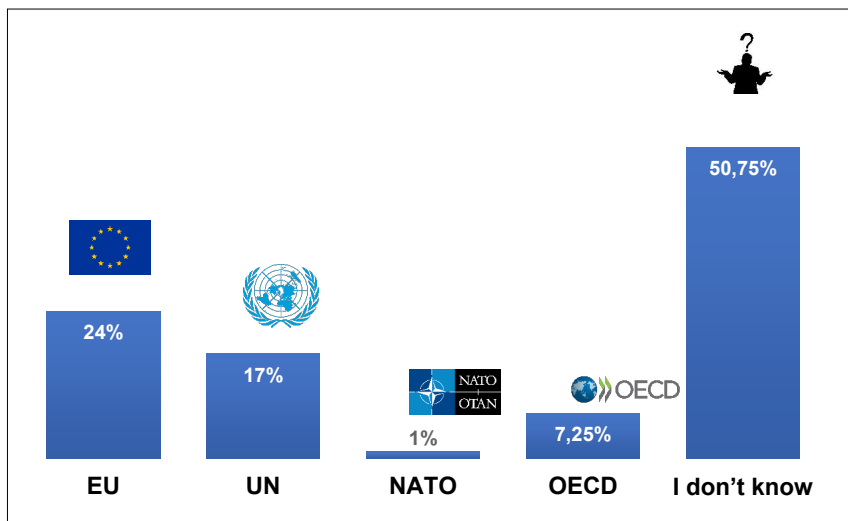
In the second question, the first reference to the main topic of the research appears, as citizens are asked to make a self-assessment of their own level of knowledge on the subject. The question is, *On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means 'zero' and 10 means 'highest', could you indicate your level of knowledge about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda?* As shown in Figure 5, the highest percentage of people (36.75%) gave themselves the lowest score (1), and it is striking that 68.75% of the respondents admit to having insufficient knowledge about the issue, which is the collective percentage of scores below 5. Moreover, the average score calculated by dividing the sum of all the scores by 400 interviews that comprise the sample is 3.27 out of 10. By gender, women show an average level of knowledge of 3.38 out of 10, slightly higher than that of men, which is 3.17. In terms of age, adults aged 34-44 have the highest scores (3.63 out of 10), while the 25-34 and 45-54 age groups are at the bottom (3.0).

Figure 5. Level of knowledge about the SDGs and Agenda 2030

Source: created by the author

In order to determine whether citizens are aware of the organisation that has been promoting this action plan to help both people and planet Earth, the choices given were the European Union (EU), the United Nations (UN), the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and, finally, the participants were offered the option of answering, "I don't know". As can be seen in Figure 6, the findings show that 50.75% of the interviewees do not know which organisation initiated the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and it is interesting to note that the response with the second highest percentage, 24%, is wrong, as nearly 25% state that the EU enacted the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. The correct answer is the UN, which is in third place, as only 17% of the respondents gave this answer.

Figure 6. Responses to the question, “Of the following international organisations, which one enacted the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda?”



Source: created by the author

Another question asked the respondents to state the number of goals that comprise the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda. A total of 90.75% either did not know the answer, or simply did not answer the question. Although the remaining 9.25% claimed to know how many there were, only 2% of the sample gave the correct answer, which is 17 goals.

To determine whether communication campaigns regarding the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda have been successful since the enactment of this action plan at the end of 2015, citizens were asked whether they could remember approximately how long they had been aware of this issue. While the majority of respondents (61.75%) said they either did not know or preferred not to answer, 5.5% said they had been aware of the SDGs since their approval in 2015, 16.25% said they had become aware of them sometime during the first five years after their enactment (2016-2020), 10.75% became aware of their existence during the years 2020 and 2021, and 5.75% believed they had become aware of them during the last few months, or in other words, from the beginning of 2022.

Finally, they were asked if they were aware that the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are part of the name of a Spanish government ministry, which is the Ministry of Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda. The results show that the highest percentage of the respondents, 34.25%, did not know that this Ministry existed, followed by 18.25% who did not know the exact name, and 19% were familiar with it, but it was the first time they had heard the name of this government body. Only 17% said they knew the name of the Ministry, and 11.5% chose not to answer or did not know.

4.1.2. Frequency of publication of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in dissemination channels

In this block of questions, the aim was to discover the main sources or media through which the Spanish population has learned about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, since its enactment in 2015, according to the frequency with which they have received content on this topic.

Firstly, with regard to the question. *On a scale of 1-10, where 1 means 'zero' and 10 means 'highest', what is the frequency with which you have received information about the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda through the media, such as newspapers in paper format, the digital press, radio, or television?* The highest percentage of the interviewees (37%) responded with the lowest score, which is 1. In addition, 75.25% of the respondents gave a rating of less than 5 regarding the frequency with which they had learned about this subject through the media, with an average score of 3.05.

When asked about the frequency with which they have received information about this topic through social networks (e.g. Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, LinkedIn, and YouTube), the majority of the respondents gave the lowest score, which is 1, but with a percentage of 52%, considerably higher than that of the mass media. In this case, the scores below 5 represent 80.5%, and the average is 2.57.

One dissemination channel of great interest for this research is that of institutional publicity carried out by government bodies, due to the fact that various studies have made reference to several communication campaigns developed by these organisations to disseminate the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda among Spanish society, as outlined in the theoretical framework of this article. To obtain data on whether these campaigns are effective, when the population was asked about the frequency with which they had received information on this subject through publicity carried out by the Spanish government, the autonomous regions, or town halls, once again the highest percentage of interviewees (42%) responded with the lowest score (1). In this case, scores below 5 represent 73.25% of the total, and the average stands at 3.03.

Finally, in terms of the frequency with which citizens have received information about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda through communication and advertising by companies, the same trend is repeated, with the lowest score (1) being given by the highest percentage of people (53%). In this case, scores below 5 represent 81.75%, and the average stands at 2.45.

To summarise this block of questions, Table 1 shows a comparison of the frequency of knowledge received about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda by the Spanish population through the four dissemination channels mentioned above. As can be seen, the general trend is that the highest percentages of the respondents gave the lowest score (1) with regard to the amount of information received about this topic. Thereafter, as the scores for the diffusion frequency of information increased, the percentages of respondents who gave these scores gradually decreased. In the end, the highest scores for the frequency of information received were given by the lowest percentages of respondents.

Table 1. Comparison of the diffusion frequency of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in different dissemination channels

FREQUENCY	Media companies	Social networks	Institutional publicity and communication	Company communication
1	37.00%	52.25%	42.50%	53.00%
2	16.25%	14.50%	14.00%	13.75%
3	14.00%	8.25%	9.25%	9.50%
4	8.00%	5.50%	7.50%	5.50%
5	8.75%	7.25%	9.50%	8.00%
6	4.75%	3.25%	5.00%	4.25%
7	4.25%	2.50%	4.75%	2.50%
8	4.50%	4.50%	4.25%	1.25%
9	1.75%	0.75%	2.75%	1.50%
10	0.75%	1.25%	0.50%	0.75%

Source: created by the author

Especially noteworthy is the small amount of information citizens claim to have received through company communications and advertising (53%) and social networks (52.25%). These two media show the lowest average values of information diffused, as mentioned above (2.45 and 2.57 respectively), and also have the highest percentages of citizens who state having knowledge of less than a score of 5 (81.75% and 80.50%, respectively).

4.1.3. Opinions regarding the dissemination of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda

In the last block of questions, the aim was to learn more about Spanish society's opinion regarding the SDGs and 2030 Agenda, especially aspects related to the communication and dissemination of this action plan.

Firstly, when asked who currently leads in the dissemination of information on this issue, the majority (48.75%) said it is the Spanish government, the autonomous regions, and town halls, followed by the media (23.25%), other bodies (13.5%), companies and the private sector (8%) and citizen organisations (6.5%). When the same question was asked hypothetically, the percentage

who believe that public institutions should carry out this task is considerably higher (67.25%), and the rest are lower: 17.25% say it should be done by the media; 8% say other bodies; 4.25% mention companies and the private sector; and 3.25% say it should be done by citizen organisations.

Regarding whether they believe a larger amount of communication on the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda would make their attainment more likely, 67% said yes, while 11% disagreed, and 22% did not know or declined to answer. Continuing along the same lines, with regard to audience preference, citizens were asked whether they believe that issues such as sustainability, social responsibility, respect for the environment, social equality, and sustainable development should have a stronger presence in advertising and communication campaigns. A total of 76.25% answered yes, 9.75% said no, and 14% did not know or did not answer.

The citizens were also asked their opinion about whether they believe that having more knowledge about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda would make them more likely to be fulfilled. In this case, 71.75% answered yes, while 11% said no, and 17.25% did not know or did not answer.

Finally, in order to discover the opinion of Spaniards as to whether or not the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda will be achieved, the following question was asked: *On a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 meaning 'no progress will be made,' and 10 meaning 'all the goals will be achieved to the maximum extent,' what do you think will be the degree of fulfilment or effectiveness, generally speaking, of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the 2030 Agenda?* The results are not optimistic. In addition to the fact that the highest percentage of respondents (21.75%) gave the lowest score (in other words, this percentage represents those who think that 'no progress will be made'), a large majority (64.25%) believe that the level of achievement will be below 5.

4.2. Access to information according to the degree of knowledge

After the survey was analysed to determine the degree of knowledge that the Spanish population claim to have about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the results have enabled the establishment of a pattern or profile of people with a very low level of knowledge on this issue, as well as those with an expert level of knowledge about the UN action plan.

Based on the lowest scores (1 and 2) and the highest (9 and 10), the specific profiles of these samples (196 and 18, respectively) have been analysed. Thus, as can be seen in Table 2, the socio-demographic profile of the population with the least amount of knowledge about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are men over 65 years of age, with a monthly income of between 1,603 and 2,145 euros, and with an educational level of vocational training, either basic or advanced. Regarding the profile with the highest level of knowledge, this is mainly composed of women over 65 years of age, with a monthly income of between 1,603 and 2,145 euros, also with vocational training, either basic or advanced. In summary, with the exception of gender, the characteristics of both profiles are quite similar.

Table 2. Comparison of the diffusion frequency of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in different dissemination channels

		LOW LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE (N=196)	HIGH LEVEL OF KNOWLEDGE (N=18)
GENDER	Men	57.14%	38.89%
	Women	42.86%	61.11%
AGE	18-24	8.16%	11.11%
	25-34	14.29%	16.67%
	35-44	15.31%	22.22%
	45-54	19.39%	5.56%
	55-64	13.76%	16.67%
	Over 65	29.09%	27.78%
INCOME	iA1 (3,005 euros o more)	8.16%	16.67%
	iA2 (2,452 to 3,005 euros)	19.39%	11.11%
	iB (2,146 to 2451 euros)	17.35%	11.11%
	iC (1,603 to 2,145 euros)	28.57%	33.33%
	iD (1,313 to 1,602 euros)	11.73%	11.11%
	iE1 (745 to 1,312 euros)	12.76%	11.11%
	iE2 (less than 745 euros)	2.04%	5.56%
EDUCATION	No formal education (primary school not completed)	2.04%	5.56%
	Primary education	1.53%	5.56%
	Compulsory secondary education	9.69%	5.56%
	6th Form or Vocational Training (basic or high level)	37.24%	38.89%
	Bachelor's Degree	17.86%	16.67%
	Bachelor's Degree (5-6 years) technical engineering. etc.	14.80%	0
	Master's Degree	13.78%	5.56%
	PhD	3.06%	22.22%

Source: created by the author

Finally, when comparing the specific profiles with the diffusion frequency of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda in different dissemination channels, it has been found that the Spanish population with the most knowledge on this subject have been informed mainly through publicity and communication carried out by public institutions, as well as companies (in both cases, the percentage is 77.78%), followed by social networks (72.22%), and in last place through the mass media (67%). However, in the case of citizens with the least amount of knowledge, only 1.02% claim to have learned about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda through companies, and 2.04% through social networks, with the mass media and public institutions showing the highest figures at 3% and 3.03%, respectively.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The research herein has measured the level of knowledge that Spanish society have about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, the aim which is to analyse in a general way the effects that the communication campaigns carried out to date have had on this initiative. The main findings confirm that there is considerable ignorance on the issue, with an average score of 3.27 out of 10. In response to RQ1, only 28% recognise its logo, and the majority are confused. They do not know which organisation has approved the initiative, nor exactly how many goals there are, nor are they aware that a Spanish Government Ministry includes the 2030 Agenda in its name.

One factor that may have influenced citizens' perception of having a low level of awareness of the initiative could be the scant number of efforts made to disseminate the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda during the first few years following its approval in Spain (Gómez-Gil, 2018). However, the data from this study have verified that only in the last few years, even with large-scale campaigns such as the one mentioned by Boto-Alvarez and García-Fernández (2020), which consisted of including the logo of the SDGs in all institutional communications by the government, these might not be effective or sufficient.

The data provided in this research also confirm that the goal of making 100% of the Spanish population familiar with the 2030 Agenda, and making them aware of the scope of the transformation it entails, has not been achieved (Government of Spain, 2019). Furthermore, what is clear is that this goal is still a long way off in the opinion of the tiny percentage of citizens who have substantial knowledge about the plan.

In line with SO1, and in order to answer RQ2, this study has determined the characteristics of the populations with the lowest and highest amount of knowledge on the issue: the profile with the least amount of knowledge consists mostly of men, while the profile with the most knowledge is comprised mainly of women. With regard to other factors, they are quite similar in both cases: over 65 years old, with a monthly income level between 1,603 and 2,145 euros, and with an education level of vocational training, either basic or advanced. Furthermore, an interesting conclusion regarding SO2 is that people who claim to have expert knowledge on the SDGs state that they have been informed mainly through communication by public institutions and companies.

In comparing the results of this study with similar research at the national and international level, it is unusual to find surveys that assure that the majority of the population claim to be aware of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, with the exception of the World Economic Forum (2019). Therefore, the survey conducted for the present research is in line with those that have found a low level of knowledge regarding the goals (The SDG Communicator, 2017; *Rede Conhecimento Social*, 2018; CIS, 2019; CIS, 2020;

Focus 2030, 2022). However, in relation to the population profiles that have higher and lower levels of knowledge, this research has found some discrepancies with other surveys. For example, although the data obtained at the international level by *AIESEC International* (2020) points to a high level of knowledge among young people, the survey conducted for the present article has found much lower levels for this population in Spain, highlighting other groups that have more knowledge, such as those aged 35-44, or those over 65. It should be noted, however, that 71% of young Spaniards are very or extremely concerned about climate change, exceeding the European average of 46% (Alliance for Solidarity, 2021), so the low rates mentioned above refer only to their knowledge of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, and not whether they are mobilised by the content and values of the action plan.

In response to RQ3 regarding the diffusion frequency of the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, in relation to the communication campaigns carried out by the various actors responsible for their dissemination to the Spanish population, the values are very low among the four channels analysed, which is a clear example of the superficial commitment to this action plan noted by Heras-Saizarbitoria et al. (2022). The average scores were 3.05 out of 10 for diffusion frequency in the media and 3.03 out of 10 for institutional publicity and communication carried out by public administrations. These figures are slightly higher than those detected in social networks at 2.57, and advertising and communication carried out by companies at 2.45. Along these lines, the majority of the citizens surveyed believe that public entities are currently leading the dissemination of this issue among the Spanish population, but an even higher percentage believe that government institutions should make an even stronger commitment and take a more prominent role. This idea is an example of the active role that Cummings et al. (2018) demand of certain actors in society, so that the SDGs and sustainability do not become just a passing fad (ElAlfy et al., 2020), which is typical of those who resort to the multiple dimensions of *washing*.

The study by these authors also reflects the importance of knowledge, especially in raising awareness among the Spanish population about the scope of the transformations entailed in the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda (Government of Spain, 2018). In order for them to be successful and become a reality, society must be aware of them and know that they exist (Easterly, 2015). Moreover, communication needs to play a fundamental role, as it has until now, in raising awareness of the transforming power of sustainable development (Díaz-Bordenave, 1998; Toro; Rodríguez, 2001; Manfredi-Mayoral, 2006; Servaes, 2007). In line with the foregoing arguments and the proposal of SO3, the majority of the respondents in this study sample believe that a larger amount of communication content and more knowledge about the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda could make them more likely to be achieved.

In short, this article has attempted to provide an overview of the knowledge that exists in Spain about the initiative promoted by the UN in 2015, with a vision toward meeting the goals and targets outlined for the year 2030. This research and its main findings are intended to serve as a starting point for future studies, which could address the way in which the SDGs and the 2030 Agenda are communicated from more specific perspectives, and in greater depth.

The main limitation of this study is precisely the restricted variety of dissemination channels through which citizens acquire knowledge on this issue, such as those analysed in this article: the media, social networks, institutional publicity and communication, and corporate communication. These are highly diverse fields with very different characteristics, and each of them would be of interest for future research and analysis. Another recommendation for a future line of study would be to analyse each of the actions and campaigns related to communication of SDGs and the 2030 Agenda, in order to determine those that

are more effective, as well as those that are less successful, and to assess whether there has been a sufficient amount of such communication, when such actions and campaigns are considered as a whole.

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7. Conflict of interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest contained in this article.

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