

The decline in reputation of communication professionals following the crisis of Valencia's media system

El deterioro de la reputación de los profesionales de la comunicación tras la crisis del sistema mediático valenciano



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Abstract:

Over the last decade, we have witnessed a decline in the reputation of professions linked to the communication and audio-visual sectors. This reputational crisis occurred in the midst of an economic recession after the closure of RTVV, which was the public radio-television station of the Valencian Autonomous Region between 1989 and 2013. This study presents the results of three questionnaires carried out in 2015, 2017 and 2019 with the aim of gaining knowledge regarding the perception by professionals in the fields of journalism, advertising and audio-visual communication of the reputation of the Valencian communications sector itself. The results confirm a negative reputational opinion of professions related to communication, which could be related to a weak associative framework and the absence of efficient communication policies that might encourage effective dialogue with public administration and Valencian society as a whole.

Keywords:

Reputation; journalism; advertisement; audio-visual communication; promotion of associations; Lobbying.

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Resumen:

En la última década hemos asistido al deterioro de la reputación de las profesiones vinculadas a los sectores de la comunicación y del audiovisual. Esta crisis reputacional se produce en plena recesión económica, tras el cierre de RTVV, la radiotelevisión pública de la Comunidad Valenciana entre 1989-2013. En este estudio se presentan los resultados de tres oleadas de cuestionarios realizados en 2015, 2017 y 2019 con el objetivo de conocer la percepción de los profesionales de los campos del periodismo, de la publicidad y del audiovisual sobre la reputación del propio sector comunicativo valenciano. Los resultados permiten constatar la existencia de una percepción negativa sobre la reputación de las profesiones relacionadas con la comunicación, que cabe relacionar con la debilidad del tejido asociativo y la ausencia de políticas de comunicación eficientes que favorezcan una interlocución efectiva con las administraciones públicas y con el conjunto de la sociedad valenciana.

Palabras clave:

Reputación; periodismo; publicidad; comunicación audiovisual; asociacionismo; Lobbying.

1. Introduction: Some points of reflection

1.1. *The value of reputation and communication professionals in the information society*

It is well known that the development of the information society has involved, and at the same time has been a consequence of the growing importance of the media, which has been heightened by the emergence of social media. In a world dominated by the power of image, the aspect of reputation management in organisations, companies, political organisations, social groups and even individuals has become a fundamental tool for survival in the complex, contemporary, media ecosystem. In a global capitalist economy, the image of organisations is the key to their positioning in the market and to accumulating one of the most valued resources at the present time: the accumulation of reputational capital (Teece, Pisana & Shuen, 1997; Helfat & Raubitschek, 2000; Costa, 2003).

In fact, the concept of reputation is associated with a set of values such as “legitimacy”, “credibility”, “trust” and “transparency” inspired by the corresponding organisation, institution, social group or individual (Alloza, Carreras & Carreras, 2013; Álvarez-Villanueva, 2012). In short, reputation is “one of the most valuable intangible assets for generating value and differentiating the company... reputation is a strategic asset for the business world” (García-Santamaría, 2019: 201). In this sense, there is a fairly broad consensus among corporate reputation specialists that the image of organisations is a result of their communication, while reputation is a consequence of the organisation's behaviour and the perceptions of its different audiences, or stakeholders (Villafaña, 2004, 2013). In recent

decades, great efforts have been made to develop methodologies and techniques for measuring the reputation of corporations. Some of the rankings that stand out are the Hay Group's World's Most Admired Companies, Millward Brown's Brandz™ Top 100, the RepTrak™ Pulse from the Reputation Institute, and *MERCO Companies* of Villafaña and Associates, to name just a few (Villafaña, 2004; Álvarez-Villanueva, 2012; Alloza; Carrera; Carrera, 2013).

It is often forgotten that the very activity carried out by communicators, who are generally organised into professional associations, also has a reputational dimension. For decades, in the main debate forums regarding the activity of communicators such as journalists, advertising and audio-visual professionals, discontent has been expressed regarding the lack of sensitivity by the political class, many companies and institutions (such as the educational system), and even society as a whole toward the relevance of communication.

At this point, it seems appropriate to make a preliminary comment. When we speak of the “communication sector”, or “sectors related to communication”, we understand this to include all of the activities related to communication, such as journalism, management of business and institutional communication (communication management), advertising, entertainment, and audio-visual fiction. Therefore, the expressions “communication system” and “audio-visual system”, or “communication sector” and “audio-visual sector”, are considered to be the same for practical purposes (CECUV, 2015). Moreover, it should be emphasised that professional activities related to communication are fully related to the context of the cultural and creative industries, which are relevant to the economy as a whole, as clearly confirmed by many scholars (Miége, 2004; Vogel, 2004; Castells, 2009; Zallo, 2011; Hesmondhalgh, 2012; Harvey, Wen & Li, 2015; etc.), as well as leading organisations such as UNESCO (2013).

In short, the hypothesis proposed by this article in studying the reputation of the communication sector and its relationship with working conditions and the quality of the service it provides appears to be of great importance, in our opinion, due to the fact that over the last decade we have witnessed a significant decline in the reputation of professions linked to the field of communication, which has led to a precarious situation for the sector and the working conditions of professionals. On the one hand, the loss of credibility of journalism in recent years has been noted, as accredited by various reports by the Madrid Press Association, by annual reports of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism, the University of Oxford, and by periodic surveys of the Centre for Sociological Research (APM, 2013, 2019; CIS, 2013, 2020; Valera, 2016; UPV, 2015; Newman et al., 2019).

On the other hand, if one observes the situation of the commercial communication and advertising sector, corporate communication, media agencies, and communication companies, it can be seen that their evolution in the last decade has also been negative. Reports from the *Observatorio de la Publicidad en España* –Advertising Observatory of Spain–, published by the *Asociación Española de Anunciantes* –Spanish Advertisers Association– (AEA), the *Asociación de Creatividad Transformadora* –Association of Creative Transformation– (ACT), *Asociación de Agencias de Medios* –Association of Media Agencies– (AM), the *Consejo de Consumidores y Usuarios* –Council of Consumers and Users– (AUC), and the *Federación de Empresas de Publicidad y Comunicación* –Federation of Advertising and Communication–, among others, have confirmed a dramatic decrease in advertising investment between 2007 and 2013, which fell from 14,915 to 10,461 million Euros as a result of the severe financial crisis of 2008 (Benavides et

al, 2015). This data has also been verified by Infoadex Reports (Sánchez-Revilla et al., 2015). Indeed, in situations of economic crisis in countries like Spain, where the economic framework is not especially strong, one of the first items to suffer cost reductions in any company is advertising.

On the other hand, results of the European Communication Monitor of 2019 stand out. This involved a macro survey carried out with nearly 2,700 communication professionals from 46 European countries to gain knowledge regarding the prestige and reputation of the professional communicator, with special emphasis on communication directors and public relations managers in companies and institutions. This study underscores the need to improve transparency in the management of internal processes and workflows (Zerfass et al., 2019), and highlights the low credibility of communicators and journalists (between 8% and 17%, respectively) in EU countries as a whole.

On the other hand, the audio-visual sector has also suffered severely from the consequences of the 2008 economic crisis. Traditional aid to film and television production, both at the state and regional levels, has been drastically reduced over the last decade, especially since 2012 (FAPAE, 2015). In the case of the Valencian Autonomous Region, reports by various entities such as the *Federación de Empresas Audiovisuales Valencianas* –the Federation of Valencian Audio-Visual Companies– (EAVF, 2014), the *Mesa Sectorial del Audio-Visual Valenciano* –the Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board– (MESAV, 2014), the *Unió de Periodistes* –the Union of Valencian Journalists (UPV, 2015)–, and the *Comisión de Expertos en Comunicación de las Universidades Valencianas* –Commission of Experts on Communication of Valencian Universities– (CECUV, 2015), have been very eloquent in their assessment of the serious situation of the Valencian communication and audio-visual sector, especially in the period between 2012 and 2016, which coincided with the closure of the Valencian public radio and television station in 2013 (Campos-Freire, 2013; EAVF, 2014; PAV, 2019).

1.2. Paralysis of the communication system: the case of the Valencian Region as a paradigm

The impact of the financial crisis of 2008, changes in the modes of production, distribution and consumption of the media, as well as the crisis of legitimacy related to public management, have all had a strong impact on the Spanish and Valencian communication systems. Analysis of the financial evolution of public audio-visual services shows that the depth of the crisis has been much more acute in the countries of southern Europe (Campos-Freire, 2016; Juanatey-Boga, Martínez-Fernández & Rodríguez-Castro, 2018), which have recovered slightly in the last three years. Nevertheless, the case study of the Valencian Autonomous Region is truly unique on an international level, and evidently in the Spanish media context as well (Bustamante, 2015; Prado, 2015; Zallo, 2015; López-Rico, 2016a, 2016b). Without a doubt, the closure of RTVV in November of 2013 has dramatically influenced the development of the media system in Valencia.

Specifically, on 29 November 2013, Radio 9 and Channel 9 terminated their broadcasting service, thus initiating a process of dissolution of the two public broadcasting companies that were dependent on the *Generalitat Valenciana* (Valencian Regional government), as well as on *Radio-television regional Valenciana S.A.* (RTVV Plc.) In 2015, a new government composed of left-wing parties came to power after twenty years of conservative governments. Faced with a devastated Valencian media scenario in which the Autonomous Region of Valencia became the only territory in the

European Union deprived of a public radio-television broadcasting service, in spite of having its own unique language and culture, the new government that took office after the 2015 elections began the process of recovering the Valencian public media. After many months of work and pressure from the professional associations of the Valencian communication sector through the Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board (MESAV), which brought together workers, businesses, and academics from the universities of Valencia, together with the involvement of the new government, the Valencian Parliament approved Law 6/2016 of 15 July regarding Radio-Television Public Service Broadcasting at the regional level, owned by the Regional Government of Valencia.

The restoration of RTVV's public service in the Valencian Autonomous Region has been a complex process carried out within a turbulent political context involving a dispersed audience with multi-screen consumption habits that have little in common with the media scene of 2013, at which time the broadcasting service was terminated (Galán Cubillo, Gil-Soldevilla, Soler-Campillo & Marzal-Felici, 2018). However, due to the fact that citizens were highly estranged from RTVV, this disaffection has not diminished in recent years. It should be emphasized that in the period from 2012 to 2020, the national and regional press has not rigorously covered the process of the RTVV closure nor the process of creating À Punt Mèdia (Public Media Corporation of the Valencian Region, PLC), but instead, the coverage has often been close to sensationalism, and has even "taken on the dimensions of a real-life 'soap opera'" with the dismissal of thousands of professionals, or the issue of job rankings for the hiring of new APM staff, which satisfied the morbid curiosity of a highly uninformed audience that was saturated by the constant "informational noise" regarding the case, in which there has been considerable confusion in distinguishing "information" from "opinion" (Marzal-Felici & Soler-Campillo, 2017). In short, the RTVV crisis has worsened the reputation of the professions related to communication and the audio-visual sector. Moreover, it is clear that the communicators themselves were, and still are, largely responsible for the precarious reputation of communication activity in Valencian and Spanish society.

2. Methodology

The study we present herein combines different research techniques: a bibliographical and documentary review of the subject; PEST analysis, or in other words, an examination of the general environment –political, economic, social and technological factors– that comprise the contextual framework of the Spanish and Valencian communication system; use of a participatory observation technique, given that the authors of this work are presently, and have been, involved in the activities of some of the professional organisations under study; surveys with closed questions based on Likert scales regarding the reputational image of the Valencian communication sector; and finally, in-depth interviews with relevant leaders and professionals of the Valencian communication and audio-visual system.

2.1. Design of the questionnaires

The design of the survey questions followed the questionnaire model based on the Likert psychometric scale, with the aim of objectifying agreement or disagreement on a statement by means of an ordered, one-dimensional scale from 1 to 5 to which a 'no opinion' option has been included, which makes it possible to improve the quality of the data

obtained (Matas, 2018). On the other hand, the authors of this paper have also followed the technique of participant observation (Duverger, 1971), due to the fact that in recent years they have participated in numerous activities developed “in relation to the life of the group or organisation under study” (Piñeiro-Aguilar, 2015: 82), leading to the development of a field journal where the results obtained were described and analysed. The authors have also participated in the writing of several technical reports, such as the CECUV Report (2015), or as guest experts on different Committees of the Valencian Parliament that have worked on the reactivation of Valencia's audio-visual sector. In addition, a dozen unstructured interviews were also carried out with the main heads of professional associations who, between 2013 and 2015, participated in organisations such as the MESAV (Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board), the CECUV (Commission of Communication Experts of Valencian Universities), and the *CIRTPV* (Inter-University Commission for Valencian Public Radio and Television), the results of which were used to design the questionnaires described below. The surveys for 2015, 2017 and 2019 were carried out with the help of the tool known as Google Forms. The links to the forms were distributed to communication professionals with the collaboration of the heads of the organisations who, from March 2014 to the end of 2019, were part of the Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board (MESAV), which is a space for debate that has no legal status, as it is not a professional association nor a non-profit organisation. Table 1 displays a list of professional associations and institutions that are part of the universe of questionnaire recipients. In the absence of exact public censuses, it has been estimated that the total number of respondents is approximately 2,500 professionals.

Figures regarding the number of members of each organisation are approximate, since there are no official data or exact censuses of a public nature, and therefore they have been obtained through direct contact with the people in charge and/or with the information available on their websites. It is possible that some professionals are linked to several organisations at the same time.

Table 1. Associations, organisations and professional groups targeted by the 2015, 2017 and 2019 surveys

Organisation	Number
Professional Actors and Actresses of Valencia (<i>AAPV</i>)	30
Association of Communication Directors of the Autonomous Regions of Valencia and Murcia	35
Association for Communication Development (<i>adComunica</i>)	110
Press Association of Alicante (<i>APA</i>)	280
Association of Citizens and Communication (<i>ACICOM</i>)	25
Association of Women Filmmakers and Audio-visual media professionals (<i>CIMA</i>)	10
Association of Audio-visual Music Composers	15
Association of Valencian Audiovisual Services Companies (<i>AESAV</i>)	40
Association of Valencian Audio-Visual Producers (<i>PAV</i>)	100
Association of Professional Photographers of Valencia (<i>AFPV</i>)	250
Valencian Audio-visual Workers Association (<i>ATRAU</i>)	174
Association for the Recovery of International Audio-visual Memory (<i>APREMIA</i>)	2
Valencian Association of Audio-visual Production Companies and Independent Producers (<i>AVANT</i>)	25
Valencian Association of Animation Production Companies (<i>AVEPA</i>)	15
Valencian Association for Animation Studies (<i>ANIMAT</i>)	15
Valencian Association of Dubbing and Sound Studies (<i>AVEDIS</i>)	5
Valencian Association of Independent Producers (<i>AVAPI</i>)	20
Professional Association of Advertising and Public Relations Firms of the Valencian Region	180
Association of Dubbing Professionals (<i>CPD</i>)	15
Advertising Companies of the Valencian Region (<i>ComunitAD</i>)	50
Scriptwriters Association of Valencia (<i>EDAV</i>)	120
Producers, Directors, Screenwriters and Associates (<i>PRODIGA</i>)	5
Union of Valencian Journalists (<i>UPV</i>)	700
Valencian Audio-Visual Academy (<i>AVAV</i>)	45
Department of Communication Science. University Jaume I	67
Department of Audio-visual Communication, Documentation and Art History. Polytechnic University of Valencia	45
Department of Language Theory and Communication Science. University of Valencia	57
Department of Communication and Social Psychology. University of Alicante	78
Department of Social and Human Sciences. Miguel Hernández University of Elche	38
Department of Audio-visual Communication and Advertising. CEU Cardenal Herrera University,	33
Department of Communication and Journalistic Information. CEU Cardenal Herrera University	13
TOTAL	2,597

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2.2. Research questions

Firstly, it bears mentioning that even though the concept of reputation has been used mostly for the analysis of intangible assets of corporations and business organisations, and also to explain personal branding and the development of leadership skills (political, social, organisational, etc.), it has been assumed that the theory of reputation can and should be applied to the study and analysis of the professional activity of the communication and audio-visual sector itself (Alloza, Carreras & Carreras, 2013; Ortiz, 2015; Villafañe, 2013).

On the one hand, after having analysed the results obtained from the participant observations carried out between 2013 and 2017, as a result of their participation in different forums and on commissions of experts for the reopening of the public radio and television service, as well as having analysed specialised reports and publications, it was considered crucial to find out more about the opinion of the professionals with regard to the press coverage of the RTVV closure, an occurrence that has had an enormous impact on the reputation of communication professionals at the social level, which we specified in a series of questions in the surveys of 2015 and 2017 as follows:

1. How do Valencian communication professionals perceive the media, and in particular, the news coverage of the RTVV closure?
2. What has been the focus of newspapers in both paper and digital format when reporting the RTVV closure?
3. How would you describe the news coverage on the international repercussions of the RTVV closure?

These questions were the result of having analysed the information obtained through interviews with the heads of the different associations, as well as participant observation.

From these questions, there was an apparent need to study the coverage carried out by the rest of the media regarding the RTVV closure, as well as the reputation of the communication professionals involved. On the other hand, it was considered appropriate to find out more about the perception of communication professionals regarding the reputation of the Valencian communication and audio-visual sector nearly a year after the launch of *À Punt Mèdia*, an issue addressed in the 2019 survey:

4. How do Valencian professionals perceive the social recognition that communication receives in the Valencian Autonomous Region of Spain in comparison with the most advanced OECD countries?
5. Do you believe the media has lowered or raised the prestige of professions linked to communication?
6. How do you assess the role of the MESAV, as well as its communication campaign entitled, "Voices for a New Audio-visual Space", or the creation of the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy?

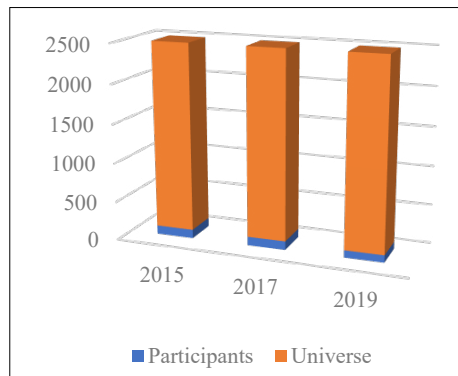
In short, the purpose of the surveys was to assess the reputation of the communication and audio-visual sector, and consequently, the questions were adapted to the changing situation of the sector during the six years that this research was carried out. In the 2015 and 2017 surveys, the same structure was maintained, and in 2019 the decision was made to introduce questions 4, 5 and 6 in order to monitor the changes the sector had undergone.

3. Results

3.1. Low participation in the surveys: an initial assessment

One of the most striking aspects of the three surveys conducted in 2015, 2017 and 2019 is the low level of participation by communication professionals –with 111, 111 and 93 responses, respectively, of a universe of 2,500 potential respondents.

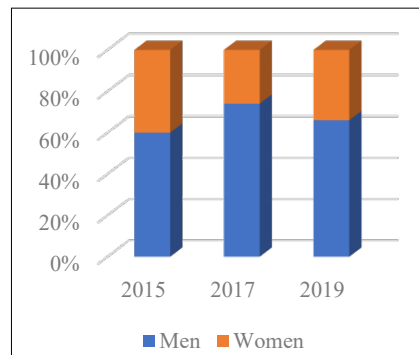
Graph 1. Number of people interviewed in the three surveys



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In terms of gender distribution, men participated in greater numbers than women.

Graph 2. Distribution by gender of those surveyed

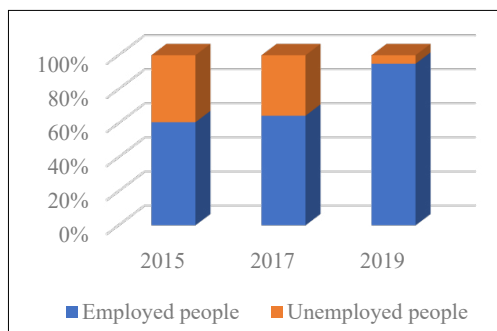


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The low level of participation by communication professionals in the surveys might be related to the PEST context and the crisis scenario that the Valencian communication system has been experiencing.

In this sense, information is available on the employment situation of those surveyed, which is related to the development of the communication sector between 2015 and 2019.

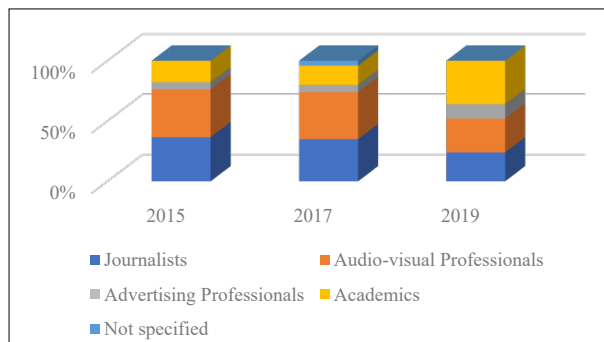
Graph 3. Employment situation of those interviewed at the time of the three surveys



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Another interesting aspect is the professional field of those interviewed, which remained fairly stable during the three surveys, highlighted by the fact that the majority of those who participated are journalists and audio-visual professionals, with a very low participation rate for advertising employees, and very scant participation from the academic world. The latter stood at approximately 17% of the total, which is very low if we consider that the number of academics in the field of communication in the Valencian Region is close to 330 university professors among the 6 Valencian universities with communication studies. In the 2019 survey, an increase in participation by the academic group stands out compared to the other groups.

Graph 4. Professional fields of the respondents at the time of the three surveys



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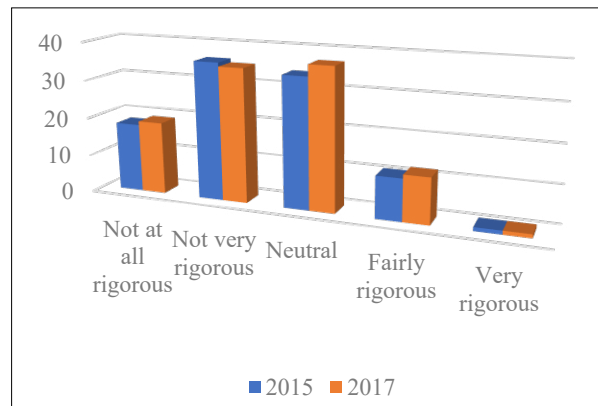
In short, the scant response of communication professionals to successive surveys is also believed to indicate the lack of awareness of the communication sector itself regarding the relevance of this service in the society in which we live, an issue that seems to be highly troublesome, in our view: in fact, the lack of corporate culture is evident even among communicators themselves.

3.2. News coverage of the RTVV closure in the 2015 and 2017 surveys

This study was designed at the beginning of 2015, which coincided with a change in government in the Valencian Autonomous Region that included a promise to restore public service broadcasting. In July of 2015, the first online survey was carried out, with special emphasis on the perception of the news coverage of the RTVV closure by the main paper and digital format newspapers in Spain and the Autonomous Region of Valencia. The survey was aimed at the different groups that comprise the Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board (MESAV). Moreover, the questionnaire was carried out again in 2017 with the following results.

In 2015 and 2017, 96% of those surveyed stated that they had followed the RTVV closure through the analogue and digital press since the time the announcement was made of its closure, and 40% stated that they were involved in reporting the process. When asked if the media had rigorously covered the RTVV closure, the coincidence was nearly identical for the results of the surveys in 2015 and 2017: 18 and 19% respectively, described it as “not at all rigorous”; 36 and 35% of the respondents considered it to be not very rigorous; and 34 and 37% were neutral in their opinion; 11 and 12% said the press covered the situation fairly rigorously; and only 1 and 1% said it had been rigorous.

Graph 5. Percentages regarding the perception of rigour in the news coverage of the RTVV closure



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The 2015 and 2017 surveys included questions regarding the focus of both the paper-based and digital press in reporting on the closure, highlighting the following arguments:

- A considerable amount of attention has been paid to the political debate in the background of RTVV's closure: around 50% of the respondents consider it relevant or very relevant in the 2015 and 2017 surveys.
- News coverage by the press of the closure has ignored the problems of RTVV workers. About 50% of the respondents in 2015 and 2017 considered this approach to have had little or no importance.
- Approximately 70% of those surveyed in 2015 and 2017 said the news coverage of the RTVV closure ignored its impact on Valencia's culture industries and the issue of defending the Valencian language and culture.
- Finally, there was also broad agreement in relation to the negative assessment of the news coverage of the RTVV closure. Nearly two-thirds of respondents in 2015 and 2017 considered the approach to have been sensational.

Next, the questionnaire included the assessment of the quality of the news coverage of the RTVV closure in the most influential newspapers in the Valencian Region. In general, respondents felt that the coverage of the RTVV closure was more complete in the digital media (53% in 2015 and 56% in 2017) compared to print media (15% in both 2015 and 2017), even though a third of the interviewees felt that the coverage was similar (32%, in 2015 and 35%, in 2017). In both the 2015 and 2017 surveys, a question was asked about the reasons for the lack of news, opinion articles, and editorials regarding the RTVV closure in the Spanish and Valencian press, with 4 possible answers, of which two could be selected:

- The figure of 51% (55% in 2017) of the respondents believed the reason for this is “that the issue is very politicised, which is uncomfortable for many journalists”.
- The figure of 47% (51% in 2017) marked the option, “For economic interests, as the disappearance of RTVV means one less competitor on the media scene”.
- The percentage of 43% (46% in 2017) of the respondents selected the option, “Because a large part of the journalistic profession is not aware of the importance of the continued existence of local public radio and television stations”.
- The figure of 13% (15% in 2017) selected the option, “Because the issue of RTVV's closure is not of interest to a majority of the citizens”.

Questions were then asked about the international impact of the RTVV closure. The first question required a simple Yes / No / I don't know answer about the news story, and it was related to the news coverage of the denouncement of the RTVV closure before the United Nations by the Norwegian NGO “Global Network for Rights and Development”, and by the “International Institute for Peace, Justice and Human Rights” in the paper and/or digital press. The figure of 57% (56% in 2017) gave a negative assessment with a No response, while 43% (44% in 2017) simply did not know about it. The second question asked whether the news of the denouncement presented by *Izquierda Unida del País Valenciano* (United Leftist Party of the Valencian Region) before the Committee on Petitions of the European Parliament regarding the closure of RTVV, which was understood as a violation of the European Charter for Minority Languages and the Treaty of Amsterdam, was adequately reported in the print and/or digital press (required a simple Yes / No / I don't know answer about the news story).

The figure of 75% of respondents said that the coverage was inadequate, while 20% said they were unaware of the initiative, with results that were identical in the 2015 and 2017 surveys. Finally, the questionnaire include an open question in order

to allow those surveyed to include their own comments and reflections on the problems raised, which has been highly useful in identifying the concerns and assessments of those surveyed regarding the situation of the Spanish and Valencian communication and audio-visual sector.

3.3. Results of the 2019 survey

Finally, in April of 2019, a new survey was carried out, this time incorporating aspects related to the reputational problem of the Valencian communication system, which are features that have been modified over the years. The survey was aimed at the same professional groups and also served to compare the results of 2015 and 2017, because in 2019 the new Valencian public media had already been in existence for more than a year. These media are an essential “driving force” for the development of the public-private media system and the development of Valencia’s culture industries (Prado, 2015; Marzal-Felici & Soler-Campillo, 2015). As we have pointed out, 93 responses were obtained from this survey

- The figure of 59% of those surveyed said that communication in its broadest sense, or in other words, encompassing everything that has to do with information, entertainment, advertising and institutional communication, receives only mediocre social recognition in the Valencian Region.
- The percentage of 38% consider that this situation is more negative in the Valencian Region than in the rest of Spain.
- The figure of 73% agree that in the most advanced OECD countries (United States, Canada, France, United Kingdom, Germany, Japan, Italy, the Netherlands, Denmark, etc.), there is greater awareness of the relevance of communication as a tool for economic progress, social welfare and democratic health than in Spain.
- Nearly 82% consider the situation to be negative or very negative with regard to media that have nation-wide coverage, as these media companies have been a factor in lowering the prestige of the professions related to communication (professional roles such as journalist, advertiser, scriptwriter, director, producer, director of communication, etc.).
- When assessing whether the restoration of the Valencian public media corporation, À Punt Mèdia, has contributed to improving the reputation of Valencia’s communication and audio-visual professions, 44% consider that nothing or little has changed.
- Nearly 82% of the respondents rated negatively or very negatively the fact that the professional areas of communication –news reporting, advertising, institutional communication, and entertainment– are so closely dependent on political activity

From these results, one can see that among communication professionals in the Valencian Region there is quite a negative perception of the reputation of the professions linked to communication, unlike that of more advanced countries, a situation that has not been improved through actions by the state or local media, nor even by the recently created À Punt Mèdia, which is the trading company of the newly created Valencian Media Corporation (CVMC).

3.3.1. Analysis of the initiatives to improve the reputation of the communications sector: MESAV and AVAV

In the 2019 survey, questions were asked regarding the role played by the Valencian Audio-visual Sector Board, known as MESAV (created in 2014 after the RTVV closure), and the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy created in 2018. With regard

to the role played by MESAV in the process of rescuing the Valencian audio-visual industry, three main aspects were assessed:

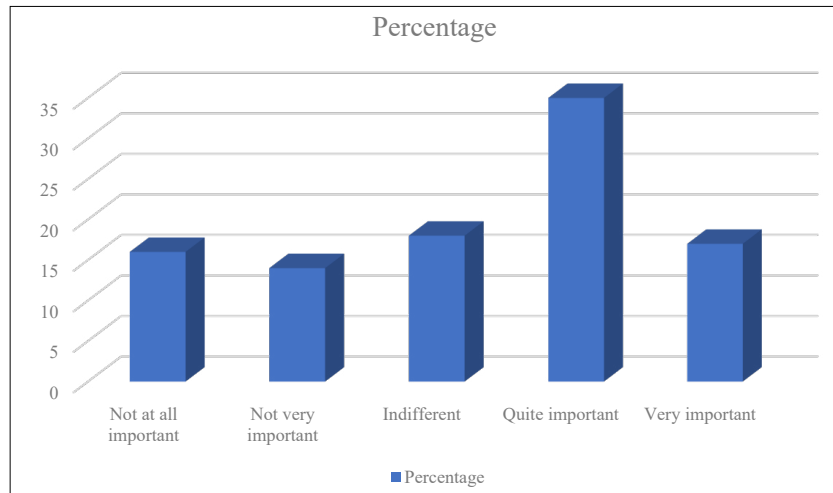
- For 50% of the respondents, the MESAV has been very useful as a space to share the problems that communication professionals have in common.
- For 44% of the respondents, the launch of the MESAV has been important in carrying out analyses and constructive criticism of policies that support the communication sector.
- Finally, 39% of those surveyed agree that the MESAV has been relevant as an exercise in transparency regarding the profession itself and society as well.

However, it is striking that for 71% of those surveyed, the MESAV has not been a useful instrument for gaining visibility in the eyes of Valencian society, as 65% consider that the MESAV has not demonstrated the unity of all the communication sectors in the view of Valencian society, and for 72% of those surveyed, the MESAV has not communicated the problems of the Valencian audio-visual and communication sector to society. Therefore, it can be affirmed that a significant part of the communication profession has not understood the role played by the MESAV in recent years.

As participants in this space for debate, we can point out that there has been a lack of involvement by a significant portion of the professional associations, which could be related to the absence of a corporate culture with a regard to the reality of communication in which a narrow and short-sighted vision prevails in the profession itself. With regard to the *Academia Valenciana del Audiovisual* (AVAV) –Valencian Audio-Visual Academy– it should be noted that this association was created with the aim of working to improve the reputation of the sector and the professions related to the Valencian audio-visual sector. To this end, it has received the support of the Valencian Institute of Culture, Audio-visual and Cinematography Section, especially for the creation of the Valencian Audio-Visual Awards.

The 2019 survey includes a question in relation to the establishment of the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy (AVAV), founded in July of 2018, regarding its relevance in promoting the Valencian audio-visual industry and improving the reputation of the professions related to this sector.

Graph 6. Responses of interviewees in the 2019 survey regarding the creation of the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy



Created by the authors

As can be seen in the graph, more than 52% of the respondents consider the appearance of AVAV to have been quite or very important. From the initial 60 members of the AVAV, the academy has grown to 145 associates in just over a year and a half, which indicates a collective will to create a large platform that brings together the interests of the audio-visual sector, even though this organisation has no room for the information and advertising professionals who have participated in the questionnaires in this study.

5. Discussion and conclusions

On the one hand, analysis of the responses from the surveys of 2015 and 2017 shows that the news coverage of the RTVV closure, and even its repercussions at the international level due to denouncements before the United Nations and the European Parliament, have been perceived by communication professionals in a rather negative way, as it has become a politicised issue in which the economic interests of private media have interfered. This indicates that many journalists do not understand the role played by the public media in a modern media system. Nevertheless, one fifth of the respondents were unaware of the existence of the international allegations. The results of these surveys confirm that in the news coverage of the RTVV closure there has been a clear lack of impartiality and rigour in much of the press, as can be seen in a critical analysis of the news published during that period (Marzal-Felici & Soler-Campillo, 2017).

With regard to the question of reputation, the results of this work reflect the need for communication professionals to improve the image they have of their own professional group.

This exercise in “self-knowledge”, which is necessarily self-critical, is essential for understanding the reasons for the lack of relevance of communication, not only in professional contexts that are close to communication, but also for understanding the causes of the disaffection and lack of appreciation of the importance of communication for society.

In the field of journalism, “The best recipe for alleviating the effects of the crisis on the sector and reversing the loss of credibility, reputation and intermediation... is to follow the path of journalistic excellence, which entails quality information and compliance with the highest ethical and deontological standards” (Valera, 2016: 116). In other words, “... The solution lies in providing journalism of excellence, and in carrying out the essential task of guaranteeing truthful and contrasting information” (Ortiz, 2015: 99). In this sense, it is necessary for associations in the audio-visual and advertising fields to make an effort to be more transparent before their public (institutions, companies, public administration, audiences, and society in general), and to communicate to society what is involved in the activities they carry out and why they are important for economic, social and cultural development.

To achieve these objectives, the association framework must be strengthened and, although it may seem paradoxical, professional associations in the field of communication must improve the management of their own communication (Torner-Ventura, 2014). They must also devote more resources to corporate communication and develop more effective communication strategies, in addition to promoting the culture of communication and collaboration among the different associations, and among the professional fields of journalism, advertising and the audio-visual realm. In this sense, in the opinion of those surveyed, the creation of the Valencian Audio-Visual Sector Board (MESAV) has been very useful in bringing together the problems and difficulties of different professional fields, all of which are within the general framework of communication at a historical moment in which everyone involved, without significant differences, has suffered the effects of an economic crisis of unprecedented magnitude. In the questionnaire carried out in 2019, it was noted that once the communication field had returned to a relatively normal state of functioning, there was a loss of overall vision that had made the creation of the MESAV possible, which is increasingly being forgotten at the present time, as confirmed by the last survey. The founding of the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy (AVAV) has been a welcome initiative among audio-visual professionals, which was undoubtedly necessary, although it is outside the fields of interest of journalism and advertising, which are areas that seem fundamental for having a complete vision of the professional field of communication.

On the other hand, the professionals noted that restoration of the new public media, the Valencian Media Corporation (CVMC), and its trading company À Punt Mèdia, cannot be viewed as a finished project. On the contrary, it is necessary to learn from the experience of the decline and closure of RTVV. In this sense, communication professionals believe it is essential to reactivate common meeting spaces in order to reclaim the importance of communication, audio-visual diversity (Albornoz & García-Leiva, 2017), and the quality of the Valencian communication system (CECUV, 2015). In the new context, À Punt Mèdia must make a strong contribution to reputational improvement of professions related to communication due to its status as the most important audio-visual company in the Valencian Region (in size, budget, coverage, etc.), which acts as a “driving force”, not only of the Valencian audio-visual sector, but also of the culture industries of the territory (López-Olano, 2018). The demise of RTVV was largely due to neglect of the institution's reputation, which in turn was closely linked to the low level of commitment to the organisation by its employees.

One of the most important challenges facing À Punt Mèdia is the development of a corporate culture based on concepts such as independence, innovation, public service, governance, transparency, credibility and participation, which can only be achieved with the involvement of the organisation's employees through quality internal communication (Marín-Pérez, 2019).

In this sense, Valencian universities and, more specifically, the academic spaces linked to teaching and research in communication (journalism, audio-visual communication, and advertising/public relations) must offer considerable aid in improving the image of communicators and the reputation of the Valencian communication and audio-visual sector.

The low level of participation by the academic world in the surveys of 2015, 2017 and 2019 is a symptom of the lack of commitment to the profession and of the existence of a continuing, large gap between the educational system and the professional world. However, this situation has improved greatly in recent decades. The Association of Universities with Information and Communication Degrees (*ATIC*) and the Spanish Association for Communication Research (*AEIC*) are increasingly carrying out studies and research into the situation of the labour market, the evolution of professional areas of communication, the emergence of new professional profiles, the development of applied research, and more. Without a doubt, the reputational improvement of communication-related professions is also linked to the reputation of the university, which must strive to be exemplary at this time.

At the time of this writing, a state of alarm was declared in Spain as a result of the COVID-19 coronavirus pandemic. Among other measures taken during the health crisis, the Spanish government declared the media to be in the category of essential services (*BOE nº 87 Anexos 11 y 13, 29/03/2020*—Official State Gazette no. 87 Annexes 11 and 13, 29/03/2020), which confirms the importance of communication, especially in situations as complex as this one. Moreover, it should be added that when we speak of the importance of the media, we are not only referring to information, which is absolutely essential in a state governed by the rule of law, but also to entertainment and other cultural and educational content, which helped citizens immensely in enduring the confinement, a situation that Spanish society was obligated to bear. Relying on the reputational improvement of the professions related to communication means making a commitment to a better future where communication will be called upon to play a major role.

6. Limitations of the study

The choice of the Valencian Community as the geographical area for this study was based on the fact that the territory has 5 million inhabitants and contributes 10% to Spanish GDP. Moreover, from 2012 to 2018 it became the only region in the European territory with its own culture and language that was deprived of public RTV services, which is an exceptional situation not only in Europe, but also among the developed countries of the OECD. For all of these reasons, the Valencian Autonomous Region offers an especially important field of study for analysing the scenario that has arisen from the crisis in the communication and audio-visual system, and for examining actions that may improve the debilitated reputation of the professions linked to communication, which could be applied to other territories, even at the international level

On the other hand, the introduction of new questions on the survey carried out in 2019, which were not present on the previous questionnaires, was due to the need to adapt the study to the new context that had emerged after the creation of À Punt Mèdia and the appearance of the Valencian Audio-Visual Academy (AVAV).

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