



Analysis of the university reputational crisis through the social networks Twitter and Facebook. The Case Study of Rey Juan Carlos University

Análisis de la crisis reputacional universitaria a través de las redes sociales Twitter y Facebook. Estudio del Caso de la Universidad Rey Juan Carlos



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Abstract:

Image and reputation are the factors that govern competition today. Organizations are increasingly focused on enhancing their corporate image even more so than other aspects of their activity. In the university realm, this is no different. Given the reduction in economic resources and changes in legislation, universities have felt compelled to focus on managing their image and reputation

Resumen:

La imagen y la reputación son elementos que rigen la competencia actual. Las organizaciones cada vez se centran más en potenciar su imagen corporativa, por encima de otros aspectos de su actividad. En el ámbito de las universidades esto no es diferente. Dada la reducción de recursos económicos y los cambios de legislación, las universidades se han visto obligadas a centrar su actividad en ges-

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in order to attract revenue. Within this context, this investigation presents a content analysis of the communications issued by Rey Juan Carlos University during the crisis resulting from the so-called "Master's Degree case". This analysis has been carried out from both a quantitative and qualitative point of view, based on a series of variables. The aim is to draw conclusions regarding how the crisis was handled, as such conclusions will help to clarify different aspects of the communicative actions after an exhaustive analysis of the electronic communications issued by the university under study. This paper focuses on investigating the variables involved in this particular case without introducing subjective aspects of judgement.

Keywords:

Reputation; university; reputation crisis; identity; image; crisis management.

tionar su imagen y su reputación, con el fin de atraer ingresos. Dentro de este contexto, la investigación que se presenta a continuación expone un análisis de contenido sobre las comunicaciones emitidas por la Universidad Rey Juan Carlos durante su periodo de crisis ocasionado por el denominado "caso máster". El análisis se realiza desde un punto de vista cuantitativo y cualitativo, basándose en una serie de variables. De este modo, se pretende obtener conclusiones sobre la gestión de crisis llevada a cabo, que ayuden a esclarecer distintos aspectos sobre las acciones comunicativas, tras el exhaustivo análisis de las comunicaciones electrónicas emitidas por la universidad estudiada. Este estudio se centra en el estudio de las variables de este determinado caso, sin añadir elementos subjetivos de juicio.

Palabras clave:

Reputación; universidad; crisis reputacional; identidad; imagen; gestión de crisis.

1. Introduction

The current situation at universities is one of growing change. Not only are they required to fulfil their main educational function, but now they are required to operate and be managed as companies as well. This reality has made it increasingly important for universities to maintain their reputation in the minds of the public. In order to do this, universities are using basic concepts of managing intangible elements: identity, image and reputation. The greatest problem in creating an image of quality and reputation among the different stakeholders that causes nearly all of the work carried to be lost is a result of crises caused by an error made by the corporation, or in connection with it. This investigation delves deeper into this subject. It involves the reputational crisis that occurred at Rey Juan Carlos University in the spring of 2018. The crisis that occurred at the heart of the university is a consequence of the wrongful granting of a Master's Degree in "Regional and Local Public Law" by this university. This crisis encompasses the problem of two subjects of the master's degree just mentioned and a third subject as well.

This work is of academic interest and aims to contribute by providing a study that analyses the crisis management of a real case at an outstanding university, in hopes that this research might allow for the identification of both good and bad practices in carrying out the management of a reputational crisis. The results of this research can be used as guidelines for crisis management, and in turn might serve as examples that show mistakes that can be made and how to solve them. The study investigates the communications made by Rey Juan Carlos University during the period from March to September of 2018.

2. Methodology

This study has been approached using a methodology of content analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, by examining the different communications through a series of variables of analysis. Therefore, this research aims to analyse scientifically the reputational crisis management of a university and to differentiate the distinct methodologies and practices that must be present in effective reputation management of any kind. For the development of this study, the methodology chosen was content analysis. The content analysis has been carried out in a systematic, objective, replicable, valid way. It is a type of analysis that combines observation and data production with data analysis and their interpretation. As indicated by Bardin (1991: 7), content analysis is a set of methodological tools that are constantly being improved, applied to content and channels of communication. “The common factor of these techniques, ranging from the calculation of supply frequencies of encrypted data to the extraction of structures that are transformed into models, is a controlled hermeneutic based on deduction: inference”, explains the author. Bunge (2000: 195) defines the object of study as “a difficulty that cannot be solved automatically, but instead requires conceptual or empirical investigation”.

Olabuenaga (1996: 205-206) presents a series of rules with which the category system of such content analysis must comply: each series of categories is created according to a unique criterion (although complex categories are also allowed based on these unique criteria), they must be exhaustive, mutually exclusive, comprehensible, significant and replicable. As explained below, within this content analysis we find two typologies: quantitative and qualitative analysis. Quantitative analysis is based on quantifying the data, so this analysis is objective, while qualitative analysis focuses on interpreting the content of the messages, so we could say that this view of the text is subjective. Qualitative analysis is defined (Abela, 2002: 23) as a set of techniques for interpreting the hidden meanings of texts. The idea of this procedure is to retain the advantages of quantitative analysis, but to develop new procedures of interpretative analysis. Qualitative analysis has two new approaches: the development of inductive categories and the application of deductive categories (Abela, 2002: 24).

3. Theoretical framework

In order to approach this investigation, a conceptual delimitation was necessary in order to undertake the study in question. Firstly, we speak of identity, understood as the features that define the essence of an organism. Applied to the corporate environment, this is defined as a set of symbols that an organization or entity uses to identify itself for diverse stakeholders (Dowling, 1996: 8). Mínguez (1999: 184-186) once again broadens the definition by dividing it into two perspectives. The first he calls global corporate identity, or corporate identity, and the second he calls internal corporate identity. Overall, corporate identity is determined by four factors: the first is behaviour, defined as the organisation's actions, its decision-making procedures, and its methods of planning and control; as well as its history, and the way in which the organisation's past influences its current and future behaviour.

Secondly, there is corporate culture, or a set of values shared by the members of the organization. Thirdly, we mention visual identity, which describes the set of features that present the essence of the organization in a visual way. Finally,

there is corporate communication, defined as a series of forms of expression used by the organization. In short, corporate identity refers to an organization's nature and the way it acts, both of which share the internal environment of a corporation, which we can use as a differentiating value. Currás Pérez (2010: 29) carries out a conceptual revision involving the notion of image, which "denotes greater agreement in associating this term with that of perception. As such, an image would be formed as an overall result of the sum of beliefs, experiences, feelings or information held about an organization or brand (...) Surrounding this general notion of image are related concepts, such as corporate image, brand image, corporate associations or positioning, which should be correctly distinguished in order to better manage them. Based on these definitions, it bears mentioning the differences that exist between corporate image and reputation. Villafañe (2004) establishes a series of distinctions between reputation and image. To begin with, he states that reputation has a structural character, while image has a circumstantial aspect. In other words, image depends on a combination of factors and circumstances of a particular situation, while reputation is built through a set of factors that can be planned or structured. The author just mentioned considers that reputation is built not only on a foundation of communication, but on corporate conduct as well.

Next, the author indicates that the image projects the "personality" of a corporation, while reputation is a reflection of corporate identity, a value defined in this study. He also points out that while image generates expectations about an organization, reputation generates value with regard to it. Therefore, image is the result of partial excellence of an entity, excellence that the public expects to continue perceiving, while reputation is the recognition of behaviour that is continuous over time and is already established in the public's mind. Based on this idea, coherence and good behaviour by the organisation will allow it to achieve an image of the company in the mind of its public.

After defining these concepts, we see how a corporation first obtains an identity, which projects a series of values that together with the influence of external agents creates a certain image that is received by the public. However, where we truly verify which judgement an organization deserves from its public is in reputation. This judgment is made on the image, which in turn is part of identity. In this way, each of the three concepts are consequences of the previous one. If the corporation makes a mistake, its reputation will always be at risk.

Bearing all of this in mind, it is crucial for an entity to be able to fulfil what it communicates to its public afterward. If this is not fulfilled, trust is lost, and reputation is affected. This need implies having a communications manager at the company, and providing him or her with the knowledge, management tools and duties necessary to be able to participate in the company's management decisions, while at the same time communicating the repercussions that these decisions may have on the stakeholders. (Carreras, Alloza and Carreras, 2013: 24).

In this context, the most important issue for any organization should be to have continuous control over its management, actions and communication. This transmits a coherent and consistent discourse to its public, which generates credibility, and above all, trust. Consequently, reputation management focuses on providing the organisation with research tools so it is able to learn of assessments made about the entity by the different stakeholders.

This will make it possible to know the difference between the reality of the organization that is finally communicated and what the public perceives from those communications. A corporation that manages its reputation and controls its communication will be able to react quickly and effectively to any error that jeopardises its reputation.

Brew (1995: 2-3) points out the aspects that characterize the university realm today. The author first mentions that universities are increasingly distant from the society around them. However, governments are more interested in knowing how public money is being spent. He also points out that demands on universities are no longer based on knowledge alone. Corporations also want qualified people who are able to make decisions and know how to communicate. The author goes on to mention that there is growing indifference toward teacher or professoriate training. Moreover, important aspects of the proper functioning of the training process are being given less importance.

This author also exposes the increasingly precarious budgets with which universities have to contend. Finally, the author indicates an important element for this study, which is that the management of universities is increasingly similar to that of large companies.

If one views the university in this way, as both a social and educational institution essential to our system, we can refer to it as a corporation, attributing to it the context described above. In any case, the level of reputation in the case of universities is not absolute, but instead is aspectual, and there are a series of diverse characteristics needed in order for a specific university to be considered as one of quality (Haldane en Mora, 2015: 18).

Among the most important factors in understanding the emergence of the concept of university reputation are, first and foremost, the transformations that many educational systems are undergoing that is leading to increased competitiveness. This is due to the scarcity of public funds and to the rules of distribution of funds for research. As universities need to compete more intensely with each other as a result of this change, they need to know exactly how the public perceives them, and consequently they have no choice but to resort to reputation management (Younger in Mora, 2015: 26).

Currently, there is a growing lack of credibility toward universities, and therefore it is essential to use reputation as a strategic communication factor. Corporate reputation management is dominated by information and communication technology. However, if we observe the practices of the majority of universities, we can confirm that the management of communication has been reduced to a simple dissemination of information, as indicated by Atarama and Cortez (2015: 27).

As we can see, social networks provide universities with very useful resources to increase their credibility and develop relationships of trust, as well as being channels that are direct and close to diverse audiences. Among these new opportunities provided by social networks, we find one that is especially useful if we talk about university reputation communication: Twitter. However, this social network is not the only option available to universities for communicating with their diverse audiences. According to the profile of each channel and the possibilities they offer, Paniagua and Gómez (2012: 352) have determined the following as the most appropriate social networks for university communication: Facebook, LinkedIn, YouTube and Twitter.

However, even with all of these options, Spanish universities still need to adopt some principles that already comprise part of the work of many educational centres on social networks, such as listening to followers or being consistent when interacting with them (Paniagua and Gomez, 2012: 362). One of the biggest risks to an organization is being embroiled in a crisis. When an organization finds itself in one of these situations, its image and reputation in the mind of its various stakeholders is at risk.

Marín (2009: 8-9) defines a crisis as a situation “that produces a gradual or sudden breakdown of the aspects of balance that support an organization and results in a process of destabilization, which if not halted in a timely manner can cause a serious, or even a gravely serious change to the affected entity”. The author goes on to explain the common characteristics of all crises: they are unavoidable, they occur for various reasons, they always come as a surprise (although it is possible to avoid their being so sudden with good monitoring and an effective follow-up system), they must be dealt with urgently, they expose all areas of the organisation to risk, and they do not occur two times in the same way, so consequently there is no crisis exactly like another.

In the communication management of an organization there must always be a place for crisis communication. Moreover, in crisis situations, maximum efficiency is required, which is why it must be integrated into the communication plan (Saura and García, 2010: 43). Some of the consequences of a crisis include monitoring by the press, effects on the development of the organization’s activity, the incessant request for information by authorities, and what is striking about the case study at hand is the resulting damage to image and reputation. For this reason, it is advisable to be prepared to face these situations, and we must be prepared with the right tools.

Piñuel (1997:7) presents a typology of crises according to the nature of the events that cause them, or based on the duration of their development. Depending on their origin, crises can arise in the environment of social relations, internal or external, in the human environment of the organization, also internal or external, or in the communicative environment, again either internal or external. In order to manage a crisis in a way that causes minimal damage to the image and reputation of a company, it is necessary to have a Crisis Plan. As Piazso (2012: 88-89) explains, when we find ourselves in an emergency, we are not in a position to decide how to act and what measures to take to solve the problem. The most effective prevention is to develop an in-depth analysis of the company in advance that is able to compile possible problematic situations that may occur, and then develop an action plan to carry out in the event that those situations occur. As Saura and García (2010: 44) explain, “in times of crisis, it is necessary to make decisions with great agility, attend to the people affected quickly, and in most cases respond to many questions from the media. In this sense, news that is bad for companies or institutions becomes news that is interesting for the press”.

4. Results

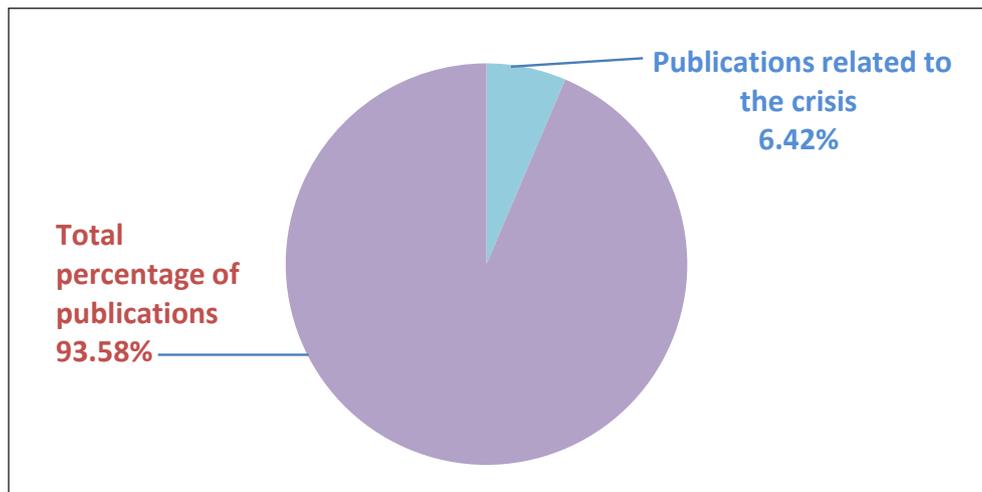
The sample of the research presented is composed of the communications issued by Rey Juan Carlos University during the period from March to September of 2018, and the objective is to analyse the crisis management experienced by this institution.

A total of 903 publications have been analysed, of which 62 address the crisis. The publications were issued between March 21 and September 11 of 2018. After compiling the information, the communications issued by the university were selected and carried out a content analysis based on a number of variables, both quantitative and qualitative. Firstly, the number of publications in the sample that the university used to report on the crisis was examined. Once this information was reviewed, and based on the results obtained, we proceeded to analyse from among the total number of publications the ones that contained content directly related to the crisis. Secondly, the typology of the publications and the different topics found in the sample were studied. Next, the number of publications, their structure and the frequency with which they communicated were analysed. On the other hand, the purpose of their content and the strategy employed by the university to manage the crisis were examined as well. The results are presented as follows:

4.1. URJC publication breakdown

The following graph presents details of the 903 publications issued by URJC during the six months analysed in relation to the publications made on the object of study in the same period.

Figure 1: URJC publication breakdown



Source: Created by the authors

Observing the graph, we can see that of the total number of publications issued, only 6.42% were devoted to the crisis, while the remaining 93.58% focused on different kinds of news. Therefore, we can see that the volume of communications that the university emitted with regard to the crisis in which it was embroiled is definitely insufficient, especially if we compare this volume to the rest of the publications that were dedicated to the institution's usual activities in the same period.

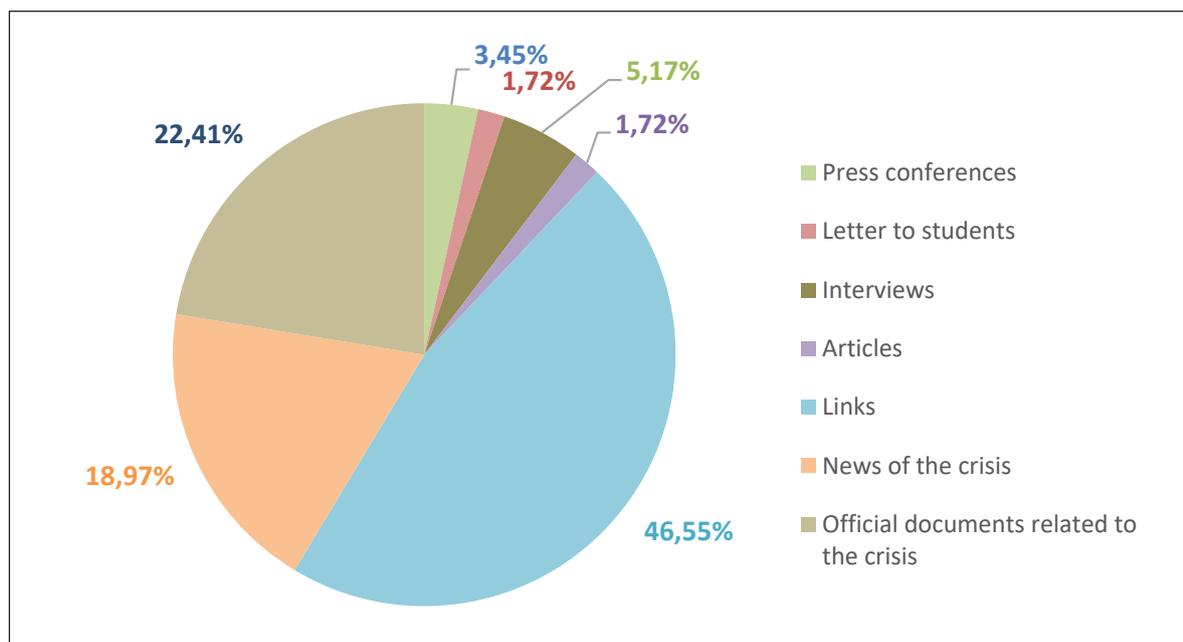
This indicates that the university ultimately intended for the public to be redirected to its corporate website, thus obtaining more visits and encouraging users who accessed the official website to navigate within the site and access other types of content that may have emphasized the positive aspects of the university.

On the other hand, during the examination of the sample, it was found that despite having four active accounts on different social networks (Twitter, YouTube, Instagram and Facebook), communications about the crisis are present in only two of them: Twitter and Facebook, with the former being the most heavily used tool, as we will see further ahead. Based on this reality, and given the fact that when analysing the Instagram and YouTube accounts we have observed that their content is composed of news about events and master classes, respectively, these accounts have not been used in obtaining the research results, since they do not contain any information about the object of study.

4.2. Typology of the publications

Below is the graph previously mentioned: it includes the results of the publication typology analysis related to those publications that refer to the crisis.

Figure 2: Typology of the publications



Source: Created by the authors

As we can see, the most heavily used typology is links (46.55%), and as we have already explained, these are nearly always links that send the user to the news published on the official website, to which the user is directed. Next in line after links, we find in descending order, official documents (22.41%), news (18.97%), interviews (5.17%), press conferences (3.45%), and the remaining typologies, with 1.72% each.

We have already indicated that the most heavily used typology is links (46.55%), or as explained in the previous variable, these are used in the expectation that users will end up visiting the official website if they want more information.

In contrast, the least used typologies are articles and letters to the students, which have the same percentage (1.72%). An issue necessary to point out is that of the total number of publications, 22.41% are of an official nature, such as press notes and releases from the university itself.

If we break down these publications according to the months that make up the study, we can see that in March, they only held one press conference (7.69%), published news about the case on the corporate website (30.77%), and the publications that were posted on Twitter and Facebook were linked to the official website (61.54%).

In April, they started using other typologies, such as official documents (13.94%), articles (4.35%), letters to students (4.35%) and interviews (8.70%). This coincides with the periods of greatest activity (March, April and September), which we will indicate in more depth later on in the article. Also in April, we can see that press conferences, links, and news continued to be heavily used (69.57%).

We can see a change from May to July. Only links and official documents were published. In May, 14.28% more links were published than official documents. In June, both of them had 50% each, and in July, there were 50% more links than official documents.

We can see how the diverse typologies are concentrated in the months with the highest levels of activity during the development of the crisis: March, April and September. During these months, the university joined forces to defend itself and avoid as little damage as possible to its image and reputation. In April, when the entire public had heard the news, the university appeared to have diversified its communications in an attempt to reach all of its stakeholders using different media.

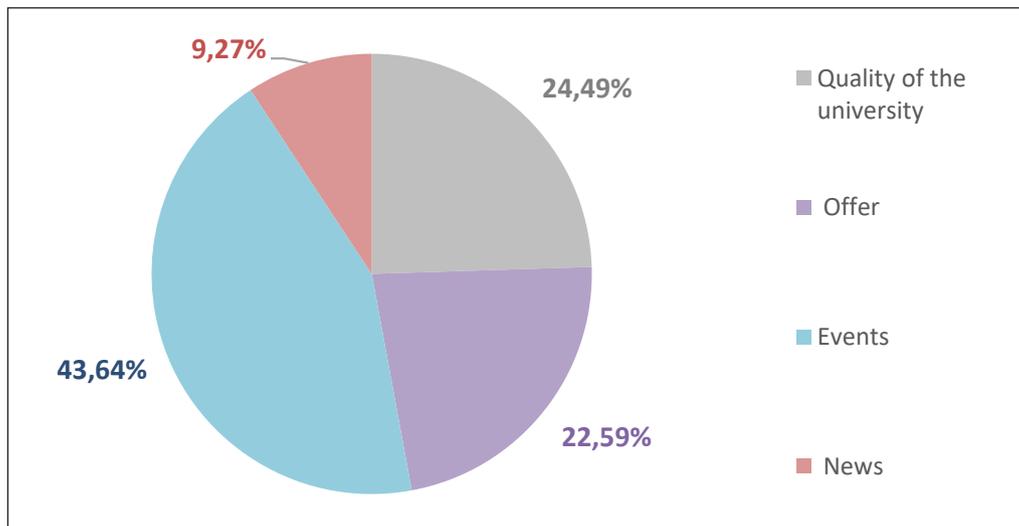
In September, we see the same effort again, though to a lesser extent. This occurred because the new course was very close to starting and it was in the university's interest for users to feel that they were in a quality institution, confident in its management, and motivated to start a new year. For this reason, the institution sought to create a situation of normality by using publications of a general character that did not mention the crisis, and that referred to positive topics transmitted through quality channels.

One noteworthy feature was the first typology of communication that retransmitted a press conference with its respective echo on social networks and the corporate website. This reaction was a wise choice, because at the moment the news broke the media was eager to be the first to talk about it and ask for explanations. The fact that the university offered its point of view was presumably a wise management decision. Specifically, this refers to the press conference held on April 6 with representatives of Rey Juan Carlos University.

4.3. Topics of the publications

To facilitate understanding of the results obtained by means of this variable, two graphs will be compared. On the one hand, we are going to examine the typology of the publications of the sample that do not deal with the crisis directly, by means of the following graph.

Figure 3: Publication topics



Source: Created by the authors

By observing the graph, we can see that the highest value for publications is related to events that take place at the university and in its environment (43.64%). These communications are usually notices about events that are planned to take place at the university or at official buildings in the surrounding area, whether they are organized by the university itself or by other institutions or associations.

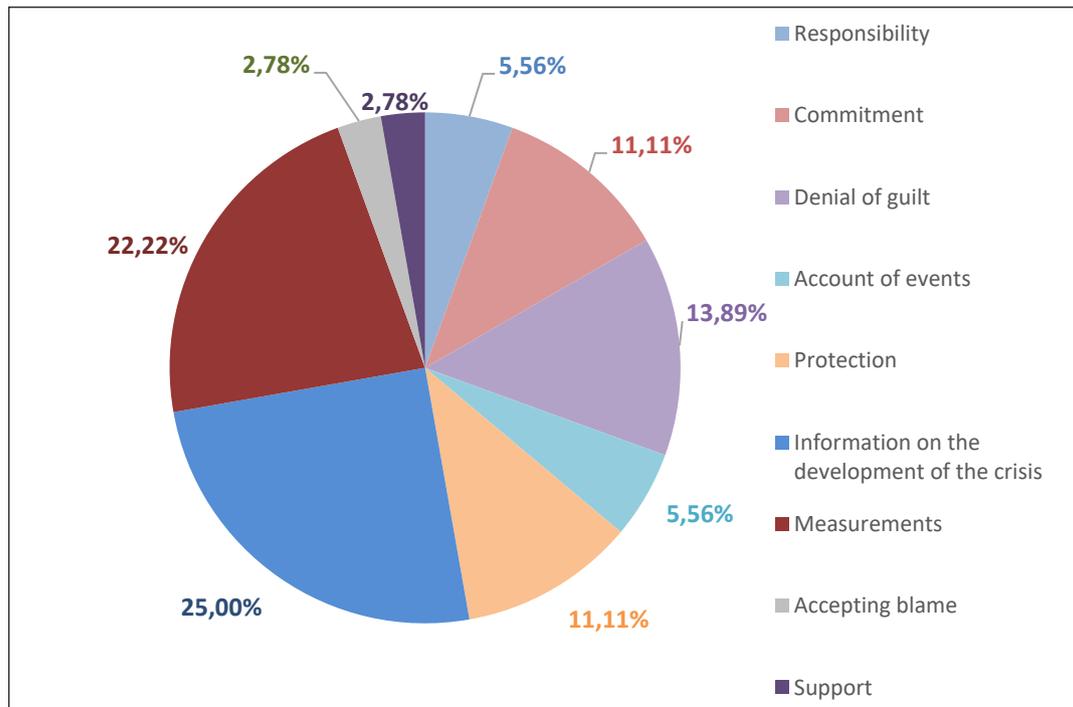
We can also see that news has the lowest value, which only represents 9.27% of the total. These news items are usually communications related to the university realm, but in which the university is not in the spotlight, in addition to projects in which the university collaborates but does not organize the endeavour. Next, we find scant differences in terms of percentages, which include publications that refer to the university's educational offering (22.59%) and communications that aim to promote the quality of the university and its offer.

Finally, communications related to quality are transmitted through publications about awards received by the university, as well as by students and professors, in addition to improvements to the facilities, higher positions in national university rankings, and enrolment data. All of these actions have a single purpose: to transmit an image of quality for the university, and to reflect this quality in its reputation.

Given the fact that these communications were published in parallel with those related to the crisis during the six months analysed for this research, we could verify that their intention was to make an excessive demonstration of all the positive aspects of the university. The aim was to create a perception of quality among the public to allow the university's reputation to be affected as little as possible, thereby counterbalancing the negative information generated by the crisis.

On the other hand, we have examined in depth the typology of the publications that refer to the crisis, which are displayed in the following graph.

Figure 4: Publication topics related to the crisis



Source: Created by the authors

In this graph, we can see that the most repeated topic was information regarding the development of the crisis (25%), and the measures that were implemented to solve the problem (22.22%).

The least common topics were accepting the blame for what had happened and communications of support received by the university, both at 2.78%. Furthermore, other low percentages that can be observed include the responsibility on the part of the university (5.56%), and an account of events that is usually presented in press conferences (5.56%). As

far as average figures are concerned, we find the declaration of commitment to discover the truth about the case along with the defence of innocence, both at 11.11%. Finally, the third most frequently seen topic is denial of guilt, at 13.89%. The information we are able to elicit from these results is that the image the university wants to convey at all times is one of innocence. At the same time, it wants the public to perceive its commitment. For this reason, the university is constantly providing information about the development of the crisis (without acknowledging guilt) and communicating all of the measures taken.

Communicating the measures taken indicates constant involvement by the university in finding the truth. At the same time, it conveys the feeling that action is being taken even when they declare themselves not guilty of any charges. Based on an analysis by month, the first thing we observe is that the strongest display of different topics occurred during the months with the highest levels of activity. Those are the months of March, April and September, as indicated in previous sections.

When the crisis erupted, the university was quick to convey its commitment (16.67%), state the facts from its point of view (16.67%), deny any wrongdoing (16.67%), report the first steps it would take to resolve the situation (16.67%), and keep the public informed of developments (33.33%).

When the accusations began to circulate in April, in addition to continuing with the same topics we observed in March, they included the defence of the university in the face of accusations (16.67%), and support from influential people (16.67%). In this way, they were trying to disassociate themselves from the accusations and make the public consider that they were innocent due to the fact that they had diverse supporters who trusted the university.

During the month of May, we observed a decline in the topics, at which time we only found information about the development of the crisis (33.33%), the defence of the university (33.33%), and denial of wrongdoing (33.33%). What this indicates is that as the intensity of publications decreases, the university gives priority to information, defence and denial of wrongdoing over other topics. It tries to continue providing information about what is happening, but without abandoning its efforts to prove its innocence.

In June, we observed that the university only communicated the measures taken, and in July, they continued to communicate those measures (66.67%), but once again they reinforced their defence against the case (33.33%). With these actions, they wanted to communicate that they were continuing to work on improving the university, yet they did not carry out any other actions.

In August, as we have previously indicated, they did not publish any communication about the case. Finally, continuing with the periods of higher levels of activity, we can see that in September there was an increase in the number of topics used, which is also striking.

For the first time, they communicated acknowledgement of their guilt for what had happened, although shortly afterward in the same speech they once again blamed third parties. They also accepted responsibility for their actions, saying that it was the university's responsibility not to have noticed what was occurring.

4.4. Tool-topic relationship

With regard to the communications studied, publications of a merely informative nature are intended to be written directly on the corporate website.

At the same time, documents in which the university declares its position, indicates the measures taken to solve different aspects of the crisis, and states the facts regarding its own actions, form part of the official documents.

On the other hand, one particular concept requires further explanation. In the communications related to the crisis managed by URJC, we observe two separate features.

The first refers to positive communications. These consist of all communications, and even though they are responses to a crisis, they have positive features. An example would be the measures that have been taken on a specific feature to ensure that there would be no possibility of making the same mistake again.

Another example is the press conference that took place on March 21. At this event, the university denied all accusations and explained how the events had occurred. At that time, this communication was in some way positive for the university's image.

On the other hand, there are negative communications as well. These consist of communications that leave the university no other option than to say what really happened due to the obligation to respond to very specific aspects of the sequence of events.

Unlike the press conference on March 21, the press conference held on April 6 was an example of negative communication. In this case, the allegations were supported with evidence. Consequently, as the rector continued to proclaim the university's innocence, he began to lose all credibility with the public.

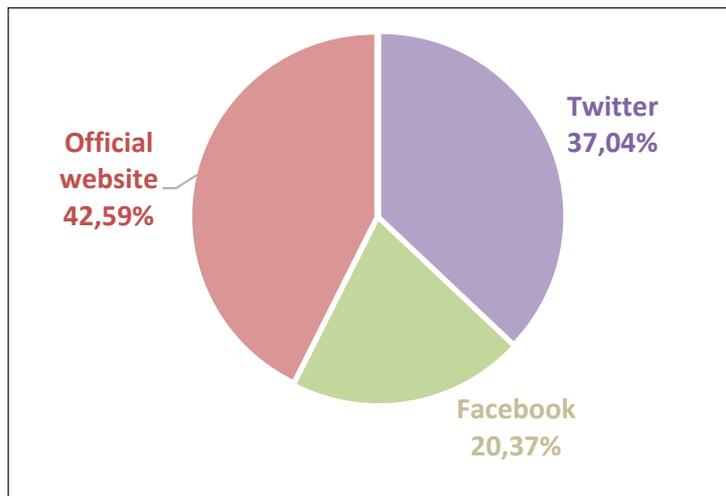
In short, the difference between one aspect and the other is simply the way of communicating, or in other words, the perspective from which the facts are told.

4.5. Number of publications

As mentioned during the development of the research results, URJC has carried out a total of 62 communications related to the reputational crisis it experienced. In this section, we proceed to analyse the number of publications issued by the university, their frequency, and the correlation with the key dates of the chronology documented at the beginning of the study.

If we look at the breakdown of publications by each set of elements, the results obtained are as follows:

Figure 5: Origin of the communication publications during the crisis



Source: Created by the authors

To begin with, we can see that the social network on which they carry out the most publications is Twitter, with 37.04% of the total. We have also determined that the social network where they publish the least is Facebook, with 20.37% of the total. The highest percentage was found in publications for the corporate website, at 42.59%.

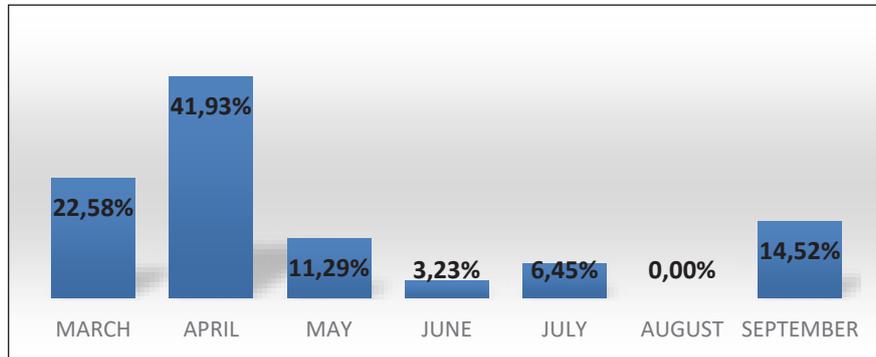
The first impression we obtain from this information is that the university relies mostly on its corporate website. They want their official website to be the epicentre of all the publications, both those related to the crisis and general publications as well, as we have seen above.

Secondly, it can be seen that the most important social network for the university is Twitter. There are 16.67% more publications on Twitter than those issued on Facebook. The activity carried out on social networks is limited to being a mere echo of the publications on the corporate website.

4.6. Frequency

The following diagram shows the total number of publications for each of the months analysed followed by an explanation of the results obtained.

Figure 6: Frequency of publications



Source: Created by the authors

An overview of the months shows that when the crisis erupted in March, they reported 22.58% of all communications. In April, when the accusations were revealed, they began to increase their communications and to express themselves actively regarding the case, publishing 41.93% of all the communications. This was an increase of 19.35% in the number of publications compared to the previous month. As the months passed, they stopped communicating actively and their activity decreased by 30%, and it continued to decrease until July when the figure declined to 6.45%. We can mention that the month of August does not even appear in the study, as there were no publications during that period. They decided to abandon the subject until they returned in September with a figure of 14.52%, coinciding with the start of the new academic year.

The number of publications per month varies significantly according to the key dates in the development of the crisis, and according to the month itself.

From the time the crisis erupted until the end of March, we can see that they published every day or every two days, but they only published one communication at a time.

During the month of April, they continued to publish every day or every two days, but this time leaving a gap in the middle of the month, publishing massively at the beginning and the end of the month. In May and June, they only published at the end of the month, and they did so only every 6 or 7 days. Throughout July, they published every day, but only on two occasions did they publish information about the crisis, which were two days at the beginning of the month and two days at the end. In September, they communicated randomly. For example, 7 days would pass before the first publication, and then 3 days until the second and last publication of the month, etc.

In summary, we can confirm that as we mentioned before, they published less than they should have and did not publish consistently. At no time did they indicate that they were following a communication strategy.

4.7. Structure of the publications

In most cases, URJC's publications share a very distinct structure, especially those aimed at mentioning aspects of the crisis. In the general publications issued during the months studied, one can observe that the images included for the purpose of complementing the communication always had a relationship with the content of the latter. On the other hand, in all of the publications aimed at managing the crisis we can see that if an image was included, it was always the same, which was the photograph of the URJC rectorate building.

Another aspect that bears mentioning is the description of "type" regarding the university's publications. For example, as we can see in the images above, the title in general publications helps one to understand or anticipate the content of the publication. However, in the publications related to the case, the titles are merely informative statements. They do not have any specific meaning until the publication is read.

Therefore, if a person is not aware of the existence of the crisis and encounters only the title of the publication, the most probable outcome is these publications will go unnoticed by them.

In this way, the university tries to ensure that the user who does not yet know in depth what has happened will not find publications that attract his or her attention.

4.8. Strategy

Based on the results of the analysis of the different variables of the communications issued by Rey Juan Carlos University, we can discern which strategies have been used throughout the crisis: To begin with, it is necessary to point out that URJC has not followed a strategy that indicates previous planning.

Following the options illustrated by Piñuel (1997: 26) that were mentioned in the theoretical framework, the first and foremost attitude transmitted by the university has been one of denial. We have verified this at different stages of the results presentation. Moreover, at times they have also adopted an attitude of silence. This is also an erroneous attitude when a crisis is very serious, and this one undoubtedly qualifies as such, because silence makes the situation worse and is interpreted either as an act of flight or as a confession of guilt.

Finally, they have conveyed an attitude of transferring responsibility. This can be clearly seen in the variable entitled, "topics of the publications". Specifically, they have transferred responsibility to certain members of the university. As indicated in the results of the topics of the publications the intention of the university is to disassociate itself from the culpability of what happened. In order for the university to detach itself from responsibility in the case, it has been constantly denying its guilt (13.89%) and blaming the errors on third parties, including the civil servants of the university itself.

We have only found one apology in an interview of the university granted to the *Cadena Ser* radio station on September 26, and immediately afterward it started once again to blame others.

On the other hand, the university has made an effort to persuade the public to focus on the positive aspects of the university, which we have also taken from the results mentioned. They try to divert attention away from the subject by placing it among positive information related to the university's achievements in reputation.

The general publications not related to the case address the topics of various rankings in which the university has reached first place, or awards and recognitions that the university has received. We have also found information that was published every two or three days during the periods of high activity mentioned in this study, which reports on the increase in enrolment percentages in the official master's degrees offered by the university.

All of this indicates to us that in order to counteract the negative communications that the university must publish given the nature of the situation, the institution finds the news most likely to promote the reputation of the university and publishes those items frequently.

Another way of improving image that we have found among the topics is the communication of the measures imposed as a result of the events, which comprises 22.22% of the total. As mentioned in the section on the attitudes shown by the university, we have observed one of defensiveness, which comprises 11.11% of the results of the topic. In addition to defending themselves, they also highlight whenever someone supports the rector and his actions. The purpose of this action is to make it appear as if they are not alone, and that there are people who believe in their innocence.

Throughout the crisis, there was not much change with regard to these intentions. As we have confirmed in the variable mentioned, it is true that at the beginning of the case, in addition to denying their guilt, they only presented the beginning of the investigation. However, when the first "guilty parties" began to appear, their good faith began to focus on accusing them. From the very beginning until the end, they were on the defensive and denied all guilt. Moreover, they tried from the start to take two positions on the networks: the first was a position in which the case existed, but they tried to transmit a minimum number of communications about it; and the second position taken was that nothing negative had happened and that the university was living through its age of splendour.

As for social networks, it has already been shown throughout the research that the university limited them to a function of disseminating publications from the corporate website without changing or adding anything. Moreover, they carried out actions on the social networks with the goal of disassociation: they stopped following the official sites of the personalities who were part of the crisis.

Another change is that one can no longer find the master's degree that is the object of dispute among the educational offering on the official website of URJC. Information on this particular master's degree can only be found on the website of *Instituto de Derecho Público* (Institute of Public Law), which belongs to the university, but has its own official website.

It is striking that the official website of the above-mentioned *Instituto de Derecho Público* (Institute of Public Law) has not included any information on the crisis. Thus, users who access the official university website by linking to news related to the crisis will not find the master's degree offered.

On the other hand, the user who accesses the official website of *Instituto de Derecho Público* (Institute of Public Law) through other types of information not related to the crisis will in fact be able to find the master's degree among its educational offering.

Focusing on another result related to the participants involved in the variable "typology of publications", we observe a clear example of the university's lack of unity.

However, at no time did we notice a segregation of discourse by audience. They do not communicate differently with each stakeholder. All public communications are directed to all audiences equally, both internal and external. The only case in which the discourse is segregated is in a letter issued by the rector to the students of the university. He did this once through the university's internal mail. It does not appear anywhere on their website nor on their official social networks.

The only way to find the letter is through the social networks that obtained and published it, or in journalistic articles that procured it exclusively, which is the way it was obtained for this investigation.

With regard to press conferences, it should be noted that only two have been held (as mentioned above): one took place when the crisis erupted, and in that press conference they defended themselves and denied any accusations, and when another was held, they retracted the first one and stated that an investigation would be opened to reveal the truth.

4.9. Neither publish nor communicate

Once the case had been completely analysed, it was observed that there were some moments when the university did not communicate, and by failing to do so, it did in fact communicate.

As those moments did not involve communication, it meant that the university lost opportunities to take advantage of them in its favour, transmitting a transparent, responsible discourse.

One example of those moments is the fact that they have not published any information on their YouTube and Instagram profiles for the past seven months regarding what happened. Consequently, they have not taken responsibility for what has happened through two of their four official social network accounts.

5. Conclusions

Once the case study was carried out and the diverse results of the research were obtained, the following conclusions have been drawn:

Firstly, URJC's discourse revolves around the quality of the university, its commitment, and the excellence of diverse aspects of the institution, such as its staff of professors. On the other hand, the crisis that has occurred is damaging the institution despite the continuous attempts to divert attention to other issues, thereby affecting the reputation of the university. Therefore, we can say that the communication of the university has not displayed a noticeable change nor a modification of its strategy, as indicated by the results: URJC continues to display a defensive attitude (11.11%), and denial of guilt (13.89%).

Secondly, another feature that should be highlighted is the use of social networks. URJC does not use the power of these networks for its own benefit. As we have seen, social networks limits themselves to echoing their publications on the corporate website, as we have verified in 100% of the cases analysed

The university could have used social networks to stay connected to the public, listen to its followers, and be consistent in its contact with them in order to convey that the institution did not abandon the subject. The correct approach would have been to use social networks to support the dissemination of news from other networks, but also to communicate with the public in a way that would have been private, spontaneous, and close to the public.

Thirdly, URJC used the rankings as a tool to convey quality in the general publications issued during the months analysed. These rankings are good instruments for university reputation management, but they should always be used to look at past actions, never to predict what the future will be.

In conclusion, it is important to highlight the insufficient number of publications in which URJC mentioned aspects of the crisis when compared to the total number of publications it issued during the months analysed. Only 6.42% of the publications were related to the crisis, compared to the remaining 93.58% that were communications in which nothing was mentioned about what had happened.

Finally, the university has not demonstrated that it has a solution that could provide the necessary preventative measures for crisis management at any given time.

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