

## Expanded abstract

### Management of digital communication in spanish cooperatives

Today, communication has become an indispensable condition for achieving a favourable position in society and business success. The Internet has marked a before and after in developing marketing and communication strategies that organisations implement to relate with the population. The increase in the use of New Technologies Information and Communication (NTIC) by the population contributes to increasing the effectiveness of companies' online communication tools, allowing a bidirectional relationship with consumers and enhancing a better relationship between the organisation and its target audience. Cooperatives, which, even though they are social economy organisations, are ultimately companies and as such depend on the sale of products and services for their development, cannot and should not ignore this new reality, which imposes new forms, different from those used until now and in which the role between sender and receiver is exchanged.

Given the importance that Spanish cooperatives have for the development of local economies and their social relevance for the environment in which they are integrated (Monzón and Chaves, 2017; Chaves, Monzón and Zaragoza, 2013; Puentes and Velasco, 2009), this research on the management of digital communication by cooperatives is necessary. The purpose is to analyse the importance that cooperatives give to the development of online communication strategies. Specifically, the general objective of the study is to analyse how cooperatives manage their digital communication. It is articulated in a series of specific objectives that complement it and serve as a basis for the design of the research and the choice of methodological tools to be implemented during the development of the same.

- To measure the degree of importance that cooperatives attach to communication.
- To analyse whether cooperatives plan their digital communication.
- O.E.3. Find out who manages the digital communication of the cooperatives.
- O.E.4. Determine the level of investment in digital communication by the cooperatives.
- O.E.5. To analyse how cooperatives manage digital communication.

The work used an online survey based on a structured questionnaire. This methodological instrument will allow the proposed objectives to be achieved. Self-reporting consists of obtaining observable data on variables of interest from the population under study in an orderly and systematic way.

This quantitative tool is one of the best known and one of the most complete of those used by communication researchers. From a scientific perspective, it is undoubtedly a valuable instrument for understanding social and business reality. In this sense, it is widely used in social science research.

The variables studied and measured were:

- Importance of communication
- Level of investment
- Communication planning
- Assumption of tasks
- Definition of objectives
- Strategies
- Presence in Social media
- Social media followers
- Implementation of actions.

The final questionnaire was implemented through the Google Forms tool. The final sample, made up of 338 cooperatives from all over Spain, was selected through non-probabilistic convenience sampling.

The results suggest that those cooperatives that implement adequate online communication management will have a particular advantage and will be better positioned to compete in the market.

Although cooperatives allocate few economic resources to online communication, it is found that the higher the percentage of investment in communication, the more importance cooperatives attach to communication. Moreover, their management from a planned and strategic perspective is insufficient. In this sense, the cooperatives that consider this activity to be very relevant have more plans of this type.

The findings show that it is not the cooperatives with the largest number of employees or those operating in the international market that attaches most importance to communication. Although cooperatives tend to increase the importance of communication as the number of employees grows, it seems that this pattern slows down in those with between 50 and 249 workers and more than 500 employees.

From a positive point of view, it should be understood that the communication objectives are considered to incorporate rather than commercial terms, and improving the image, achieving notoriety and building customer loyalty stand out among the objectives of these companies, above other more market-oriented objectives such as promoting and selling products and services. In this sense, one shortcoming has to do with internal communication. Due to their eminently social and democratic nature, these organisations are a key element in which cooperative members do not set their communication objectives in terms of internal communication.

The cooperatives choose to promote the web as an information portal ahead of more interactive strategies in line with web 2.0, especially social media, about the development of digital communication strategies.

Finally, neither do the cooperatives studied develop critical actions in the management of digital communication, such as measuring the return on investment or studying non-economic KPIs, which are fundamental when analysing the strategies being developed.

For all these reasons, it can be stated that the cooperatives analysed are at a medium-low level in terms of their digital communication management. Lack of investment and planning, preference for the web over social media or paid advertising and lack of measurement allow us to affirm that the cooperatives should boost their digital communication much more and promote it through investment and strategic plans.

Given these results, things have not changed much and currently; cooperatives still do not have a strategic vision of their (digital) communication, being scarce the resources they devote to it both in terms of planning and investment, which results in low visibility of these organisations within society to help their development and growth.

There is little research that has tried to analyse the digital strategies developed by cooperatives to our knowledge. This work provides information from a large part of the target population, so the findings are robust and generalisable. The study results highlight the reality of Spanish cooperatives concerning their communication strategies and their current shortcomings.

**Keywords:** Business communication, Digital communication, Social Media Marketing, Communication management, web 2.0.