

Interactive communication of Chilean companies on Facebook: a comparative study with Latin American companies

Comunicación interactiva de las empresas chilenas en Facebook: un estudio comparativo con las empresas latinoamericanas

Comunicação interativa das empresas chilenas no Facebook: um estudo comparativo com as empresas latino-americanas

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ARTICLE



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Abstract

The objective of this study is to analyze how Chilean companies manage interactive communication with their audiences on Facebook. 29,000 posts from 135 company profiles were analyzed through a comparative study with Latin American companies. The selected categories were the communication approach, information resources, interaction level and interaction rate. The results show that the dissemination of information is mainly unidirectional and not very interactive. The study shows that companies in Chile and Latin America promote visibility instead of managing interactive communication in this social network.

KEYWORDS

Corporate communication, Social networks, Interactivity, Companies, Facebook.

Resumen

El objetivo de este estudio es analizar como las empresas chilenas gestionan la comunicación interactiva con sus públicos en Facebook. A través de un estudio comparativo con las empresas latinoamericanas, se analizaron 29.000 posts de 135 perfiles de empresas. Las categorías seleccionadas son el enfoque de comunicación, recursos de información, nivel de interacción y tasa de interacción. Los resultados arrojan que la difusión de información es principalmente unidireccional y poco interactiva. El

estudio pone en evidencia que las empresas de Chile y América Latina promueven la visibilidad en lugar de gestionar la comunicación interactiva en la red social.

PALABRAS CLAVE

Comunicación corporativa, Redes sociales, Interactividad, Empresas, Facebook.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é analisar como as empresas chilenas fazem a gestão da comunicação interativa com seus públicos no Facebook. Através de um estudo comparativo com as empresas latino-americanas, foram analisa-

dos 29.000 posts de 135 perfis de empresas. As categorias selecionadas são a abordagem de comunicação, recursos de informação, nível de interação e taxa de interação. Os resultados mostram que a difusão de informação é principalmente unidirecional e pouco interativa. O estudo mostra que as empresas do Chile e da América Latina promovem a visibilidade em vez de gerenciar a comunicação interativa na rede social.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Comunicação corporativa, Redes sociais, Interatividade, Empresas, Facebook.

1. INTRODUCTION

The digital field and social networks have become key tools for companies to communicate with their audiences. The possibility of generating dialogue and interaction with users allows organizations to use digital platforms to establish and strengthen relationships with their publics by maintaining an active presence, creating content of interest and fostering digital conversations. Academics and communication specialists agree more than ever that social networks are changing the communication of organizations and institutions (Cordón-Benito & González-González, 2016; Valdez & Guerrero, 2019; Wright & Hinson, 2017), and Latin American professionals prefer digital channels to communicate with their audiences (Moreno et al, 2015).

The maturity of social networks, especially Facebook (the social network with the highest penetration and popularity), and the consolidation of the digital consumption habits of the publics have caused companies to recognize the potential of the social network and include it in their communication and public relations

strategies (DiStaso & McCorkindale, 2013; Lee, 2016; Neill & Moody, 2015). Facebook facilitates content sharing and enables dialogue and interaction between organizations and the publics. Compared to other social networks, the number of users of this social network has grown significantly in recent years. A study on the state of social networks in Latin America confirms that there was an exponential growth of social networks in the region, with Facebook being the social network with the highest social participation (Castro & Vega, 2018).

Although Facebook is presented as a new professional opportunity, the management of corporate communication in this social network continues to be one of the greatest challenges at a professional level, since it requires planning the content that is disseminated and the communication resources that are used in order to promote interaction with users. Despite the strong potential of social networks to develop relationships with the publics, some authors highlight the need to establish a roadmap to manage the way in which the actions of organizations are communicated on social networks (Chung et al., 2017).

To guarantee the bidirectionality of communication, organizations must not only interact with the publics, but must also show a predisposition to dialogue, listen, know their needs and desires (Taylor & Kent, 2014). In contrast, studies indicate that communication management continues to be asymmetric (Wissen, 2017), focusing more on the dissemination of unidirectional information than on conversations with users.

The main objective of this research is to analyze the interactive communication of the main Chilean companies on Facebook based on a comparative analysis with the companies of the main Latin American countries.

2. INTERACTIVE COMMUNICATION ON FACEBOOK

Social networks changed the way communication is managed in the organizations, becoming a key instrument for dialogue and interaction. This new communication model replaces personally limited forms of human interaction, opening the possibility of forming virtual communities (Castells, 2001). Several authors (Kim et al., 2014; Losada-Díaz & Capriotti, 2015; Waters et al., 2009; Wissen, 2017) argue that the basis of communication management in social networks is based on the principles of dialogic communication. Dialogic communication is the basis for building and maintaining mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their audiences through the Internet (Kent & Taylor, 2002). Through interactive and dialogic communication, companies can understand their audiences, promote their activities and increase their virtual notoriety and reputation (Gonçalves Pereira et al., 2014).

Dialogic theory suggests that organizations should not only disseminate information, but are also expected to be willing to interact and converse with their audiences. In this sense, two main communication approaches in social networks are identified. In the first approach, where the tools used are unidirectional and the level of interactivity is low, the main objective is to disseminate information to increase digital visibility and influence the image of companies. In the second approach, where the tools used are bidirectional and the degree of interactivity is high, the main objective is to build relationships through dialogue and interaction between the organization and users.

Bortree and Seltzer (2009) and Diga and Kelleher (2009) emphasize that social networks promote dialogic communication. The great popularity and penetration achieved by social networks (specifically Facebook) and the consolidation of the digital consumption habits of the publics are causing organizations to lean towards dialogue and interaction on Facebook. It is important to emphasize that for dialogue to take place it is necessary to share content that favors interaction, since messages that promote interaction and dialogue generate greater engagement with the publics (Abitbol & Lee, 2017).

Dialogical communication on Facebook depends on different types and degrees of interaction: likes, shares and comments. For example, a like requires less effort and commitment, while shares and comments require more (Brubaker & Wilson, 2018; Capriotti et al., 2019). Likes suggest that users (in some way) appreciate the content posted on the social network, albeit in a passive way. Recently, Facebook has introduced other features to its popular like function, such as emoticons that allow showing different feelings: "Love", "Care", "Haha", "Wow", "Sad", "Angry". On the other hand, when users

share third-party posts on their profile, they become volunteer spokespersons. Finally, the comments are those that explicitly manifest the conversation on the social network. Through the fluid exchange of information, comments facilitate dialogue (Cho *et al.*, 2014).

The results of the *Social Media Benchmarks Report* show that there is no positive correlation between the number of posts made by companies and the interactions generated in the posts (Devaney, 2015). In other words, posting more does not necessarily mean increasing the level of interactions. In order to increase the level of interactions, it is necessary to share content of interest that promotes interaction and dialogue with the publics.

On the other hand, the data obtained from other studies show that even though there is a high predisposition on the part of users to interact on the contents that promote communicative exchange (Cho *et al.*, 2014), organizations continue to promote one-way communication on Facebook (Aced-Toledano & Lalueza, 2018; Capriotti & Losada-Díaz, 2018; Huang *et al.*, 2016; Rivallo, 2018; Sundstrom & Levenshus, 2017; Wissen, 2017). In this sense, Facebook becomes a useful platform for dialogic communication, in other words, an ideal space to share content of interest and dialogue with the publics.

The communicative function in an organization is not only to disseminate information, but also to promote dialogue with the publics. Safko and Brake (2009) explain that to generate conversations it is first necessary to attract users, and this is achieved through the creation and dissemination of content that promotes dialogue with the publics. For this, organizations have at their disposal different information resources on Facebook that can be combined with each other.

Social networks allow the creation and dissemination of interactive content in different formats that can be combined with each other: images, texts, links, hashtags, emoticons, user tags, audio-video and animated images (GIFs). These resources can be grouped into three groups: graphic resources (photo/image, text and emoticon), interactive resources (user tag, link and hashtag) and audiovisual resources (audio-video and GIF) (Capriotti & Zeler, 2020; Capriotti *et al.*, 2019). Although each social network has its own characteristics that allow one or more resources to be highlighted, currently all have graphic, interactive and audiovisual resources.

Several studies (Invodo, 2016; Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Quintly, 2016) suggest that disseminating content that includes various information resources on social networks contributes positively to achieving greater reach and interaction. Among the different resources available, videos are considered a valuable element for strategies in social networks because they require a higher level of commitment (Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013). According to studies, 7 out of 10 users in the Latin American region watch videos on the main social networks (Valentine, 2017), to which the ComScore *Digital Future 2017* study adds that video consumption in Latin America has increased the last year (Fosk, 2017). According to Valentine (2017), these results are accompanied by the new functions related to the audiovisual impulse that social networks made available to users to get on the digital trend.

Despite the fact that research is indicating that there is an exponential growth in the use of audiovisual resources on Facebook (due to the increase in connection speeds and technological improvements of mobile devices), images continue to be the most used resource in the social network profiles (Brubaker & Wilson,

2018; Cohen, 2016; Fosk, 2015; Luarn et al., 2015). This shows that organizations are using the resources available on Facebook (mainly through graphic resources) although they are wasting other possibilities offered by Facebook to increase the level of interaction with users through interactive and audiovisual resources.

3. METHODOLOGY

The object of study of this research are the main companies in Chile. To identify the companies, those with the best reputation in Chile and which are present in the annual study prepared by MERCO (MERCOSUR companies) were taken as a reference, since they are considered benchmarks in matters of strategic management of corporate communication (Capriotti et al., 2019). Thus, the first 35 companies in the ranking that were present for two consecutive years were taken.

The list of the top 35 companies in the rankings of Argentina, Brazil, Mexico, Peru and Colombia prepared by the same MERCOSUR (MERCOSUR companies), also present for two consecutive years, was taken as a reference to comparatively evaluate the management of communication on Facebook of Chilean companies with companies from the rest of Latin America.

Of the total number of companies selected, those that have official corporate fan pages on Facebook nationwide were taken. The profiles were identified by popular Internet search engines and the official websites of the companies. Those profiles that could not be verified were discarded. The final sample included 135 Facebook profiles: 19 profiles from Chile and 116 profiles from Latin America (23 from Argentina, 19 from Mexico, 27 from Colombia, 25 from Brazil and 22 from Peru).

The analysis was carried out over 12 months: from January to June 2015 and from July to December 2016. In both periods, 2 weeks per month were taken: the odd weeks in 2015 and the even weeks in 2016. Finally, a total of 29,078 posts was obtained.

The general objective of this research was to analyze the interactive communication of the main Chilean companies on Facebook based on a comparative analysis with the companies of the main Latin American countries. For this, 3 research questions (RQ) were established:

RQ1: What general communication approach does content disseminated by companies have on Facebook?

RQ2: What information resources are included in the posts of the companies?

RQ3: What level of interaction does the content disseminated by companies on Facebook generate?

RQ4: What interaction rate is obtained from said content disseminated on Facebook? What interaction rate is obtained from said content disseminated on Facebook?

To answer the research questions (RQ), the content analysis methodology was used and 4 categories of analysis were defined. These categories were developed and tested in previous studies (Capriotti et al., 2016; Capriotti et al., 2019).

The communication approach (RQ1) analyzes the strategy of the disseminated publications from 2 aspects: (a) an informative approach that refers to the creation and presentation of informative content (said content is descriptive/expository and encourages unidirectional communication), and (b) an interactive approach that refers to the creation and dissemination of

content intended to trigger conversations and the exchange of information.

Information resources (RQ2) refer to the different resources used to disseminate content to users. Thus, 3 graphic resources were defined (image, text and emoticon), 3 interactive resources (link, hashtag and user tag), and 2 audiovisual resources (audio-video and GIF). More than one resource can be included in this analysis category.

The level of interaction (RQ3) allows to analyze the volume of reactions generated in the content disseminated by the companies. To study the level of interaction, 3 dimensions were defined: (1) Support Level (SL), obtained from the average number of likes per company and post; (2) Viralization Level (VL), obtained from the average number of shares per company and post; and (3) Conversation Level (CL), obtained from the average of comments per company and post.

The interaction rate (RQ4) allows analyzing the volume of reactions generated by the content disseminated in relation to the number of followers of the companies. For this category, three dimensions were defined: (1) Support Rate (SR) obtained from dividing the total number of likes per post in relation to the total number of followers of the companies and multiplied by 100; (2) Viralization Rate (VR) obtained from dividing the total number of shares per post in relation to the total number of followers of the companies and multiplied by 100; (3) Conversation Rate (CR) obtained from dividing the total number of comments per post in relation to the total number of followers of the companies and multiplied by 100. Combining the three dimensions, the General Interaction Rate (GIR) was obtained. The GIR is the result of the sum of SR+VR+CR (Kaushik, 2011; Narayanan et al., 2012).

The Fanpage Karma monitoring tool, available on the Internet, was used to collect the publications. The information obtained was gathered and coded in an Excel template designed specifically for this research.

4. RESULTS

The study reveals that companies in Chile and those in Latin America (LatAm) have a majority presence on Facebook. More than 80% of the companies studied have fan pages on the social network. Also, companies publish content quite frequently. Although Chile is one of the countries with the least number of companies present on Facebook (19 out of 23 companies analyzed), it is the country with the highest level of activity on the social network (reaching almost 2 posts per day per company).

Regarding the communication approach of the posts of the companies (RQ1), the results show that the companies of Chile and LatAm tend broadly towards the dissemination of content with a purely informative approach on Facebook. In other words, more than 70% of the posts are created to disseminate content and inform users about the activities of companies. In contrast, posts with an interactive approach are less than 30% (Table 1).

Table 1

Communication approach of companies on Facebook (%)

	Informational approach	Interactive approach
Chile	71,6	28,4
LatAm	74,5	25,5

The difference is very insignificant between companies in Chile (71.6%) and those in LatAm (74%), since in both cases the informational approach is predominant.

Table 2*Information resources of companies on Facebook*

	Total	Graphic			Interactive			Audiovisual
		Text	Image	Emoticon	User tag	Hashtag	Link	Audio-video/ GIF
Chile	N	5914	4635	1044	442	2323	3226	838
	(%)	98,3	77,1	17,4	7,3	38,6	53,6	22,0
LatAm	N	4503	3571	494	832	1897	2183	787
	(%)	97,7	77,5	11,0	18,4	40,9	47,9	21,6

The analysis of the information resources included in the content disseminated by Chilean companies on Facebook (RQ2) reveals that graphic resources are the most used. Almost all of the posts disseminated include a main text (98.3%), which is mostly accompanied by one or more images or photographs (77.1%). Few cases use emoticons (17.4%). This reveals that companies are not exploiting this resource much, which allows them to empathize with users and make communication more friendly (Table 2).

On the other hand, among the least used resources are audiovisual resources (22%). Of the total of posts that include audiovisual resources, 9% correspond to videos and 13% to GIF. This data shows that there is a great waste of this resource at the communicational level, which allows increasing the level of commitment by requiring more attention from the user.

Interactive resources are also included, mainly links (53.6%) and hashtags (38.6%). The user tag is rarely used (7.3%). This means that at least half of the posts have at least one interactive resource. Unlike audiovisual resources, interactive ones are more included in the posts of companies in Chile, but their use continues to be less than graphic resources (Table 2).

When comparing companies in Chile and the rest of LatAm, little significant differences are found. LatAm companies also use text and image as basic resources to create and disseminate content, and include audiovisual resources less frequently than interactive resources. However, it should be noted that LatAm companies use emoticons less (11%) and that at least half tend to use more than one interactive resource in their posts. The results of the analysis show that almost 20% of the posts have user tags, 40% include hashtags and almost 50% contain links.

The results of the level of interaction (RQ3) reveal that the level of interaction generated in the content of Chilean companies is mainly determined by the large volume of likes obtained by the posts, compared to shares and comments (Table 3). The average number of likes is 316 per company and post, shares are 23.2 per company and post, and comments are 49.3 per company and post. In percentage, these results show that SL represents 81.3%, VL 6% and CL 12.7% of all interactions received in company posts.

Table 3*Level of interaction of companies on Facebook*

		SL	VL	CL
Chile	(Average company/post)	316,0	23,2	49,3
	(%)	81,3	6,0	12,7
LatAm	(Average company/post)	1.599,7	133,9	62,1
	(%)	89,1	7,5	3,5

The differences between companies in Chile and the rest of LatAm are significant. Although they share as a result the large volume of likes received in the disseminated content, the volume of likes of Latin American companies is much higher than that of those in Chile. This exceeds 5 times the average number of likes per company and post in Chile (1,599.7). The LatAm SL represents 89.1%, that is to say that almost all the interactions of LatAm companies are likes. Another significant difference is that LatAm companies receive more shares than comments on posts. The average number of shares per company and post (133.9) is twice as high as the average number of comments per company and post (62.1). In percentage terms, the VL constitutes 7.5% and the CL represents 3.5%. Both add up to 11% of the total interactions.

Although the results of the level of interaction show that the average number of interactions per company and post is high, it must be taken into account that companies have a large volume of followers. The average of Chilean companies is 432,974 fans per company and the average of LatAm companies is 2,696,614 fans per company. In relation to this average number of fans per company, the results of the interaction

rate (RQ4) show that the interaction generated is low. The data obtained from companies in Chile indicate that the SR is higher than the rest (11.6% per year), with the like button being the interaction instrument most used to interact with the contents of the companies. The SR far exceeds the VR (0.8% per year) and the CR (1.8% per year). The sum of the three interaction instruments presents a GIR of 14.2%, demonstrating once again that the total interaction generated is low (Table 4).

Table 4*Interaction rate of companies on Facebook*

	SR	VR	CR	GIR
	(%) anual			
Chile	11,6	0,8	1,8	14,2
LatAm	11,6	1,1	0,7	13,5

When comparing the results of Chile with LatAm, some significant differences are found. Although both obtain a SR of 11.6% (due to the large volume of likes obtained per post and company), VR and CR together represent 1.8% of the total. In other words, the VR plus the CR of the LatAm companies mean a third less than the VR and the CR of the Chilean companies together (2.6%). In Table 4 it can be seen as a result of the sum of the SR, VR and CR, that the GIR obtained in LatAm companies is 13.5%. This result shows that, despite the fact that LatAm companies have a volume 5 times higher than Chile's fans, the LatAm GIR is lower than the Chile GIR. In other words, companies in Chile receive more interaction than companies in the rest of LatAm as a whole.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The study carried out reveals that the presence of Chilean companies on Facebook is the majority, while their activity is quite frequent. Comparing the results of Chile with LatAm, the first is the one with the least presence, but still the most active in the social network.

The analysis of the communication approach (RQ1) shows that a mainly informative approach is maintained. Less than a third of the total posts that are disseminated in Chile and LatAm promote interaction, that is, invite the audience to carry out some type of specific action (participate, comment, subscribe, etc.). Among the interactive actions that are promoted, participating in contests, events and other activities is what is most included in the publications. On a few occasions, users are invited to share their opinions on the topics that companies discuss. In this sense, companies are wasting one of the opportunities offered by communication on Facebook in relation to the possibility of knowing the needs and desires of the publics based on the opinions of users (Taylor & Kent, 2014).

On the other hand, the contents that companies disseminate are mostly created with information resources (RQ2) that are not very interactive. The findings showed that mainly companies in Chile and LatAm use graphic resources in their publications. Only half of the posts (or less in the case of LatAm), include an interactive resource in the posts or audiovisuals (around 20% of the total). This indicates that companies are largely wasting the possibility of further promoting interaction in the social network through the use of interactive and/or audiovisual resources, the latter being key elements to generate greater interaction since they imply a level of commitment greater than the rest (Costa-Sánchez & Túnñez-López, 2019;

Pletikosa Cvijikj & Michahelles, 2013; Quintly, 2016).

Analyzing the results of RQ1 and RQ2, two connection points between them are detected. On the one hand, the findings allow us to affirm that companies are managing their communication for the dissemination of information, since the communication approach is mainly informative and the resources that are most used are not very interactive. On the other hand, it can be observed that, although there is a significant number of companies that include interactive and audiovisual resources in the disseminated content, few are those that promote interaction.

Finally, the level of interaction obtained in corporate content (RQ3) indicates that there is a high volume of interaction. However, the highest percentage responds to the likes received in companies in Chile, in the same way that happens in companies in LatAm. In contrast, shares and comments receive a much lower volume. Undoubtedly, the level of likes does not have the same interactive value as the level of shares and comments (Cho et al., 2014). Thus, the interaction rate (RQ4) obtained is low. This suggests that there is a poor percentage of users who interact with the content disseminated by companies, which allows us to make a series of reflections. On the one hand, it may be that the content disseminated by companies generates little interest for users. On the other hand, it may be that companies have little interest in dialoguing with users on the social network, despite the fact that the authors emphasize the potential of social networks to generate dialogue (Kim et al., 2014; Losada-Díaz & Capriotti, 2015; Waters et al., 2009; Wissen, 2017).

As a conclusion of this study, it can be affirmed that the communication management

of Chilean companies (as well as those of the rest of LatAm) on Facebook is mostly one-way. Chilean companies are quite active in the social network, but the contents have an informative communication approach. The resources they use to create content are not very interactive too. This directly affects the low interaction rate generated. According to the *Latin American Communication Monitor* study, the majority of professionals in Latin America evaluate the level of interaction of users in the networks based on positive comments towards the organization and active communication with the organization (Moreno et al., 2017). However, it is important to keep in mind that the level of user interaction depends on the interaction management that organizations carry out on Facebook. In other words, if companies use social networks as a one-way communication channel, users are likely to generate a lower level of interaction than if companies use social networks as a dialogical communication channel.

The inclusion of Facebook in communication strategies implies a professional commitment to use the tool to maintain mutually beneficial relationships with audiences on a digital level. Thus, maintaining an active presence and properly promoting interaction are key aspects to achieve successful communication management on Facebook. For this, companies in Chile and LatAm should use this social network more as a communication channel to generate dialogue and not so much as a dissemination channel to obtain greater digital visibility.

This study was developed under a specific methodology that allowed the analysis of communication management on Facebook, which was adapted to a specific object of study (companies). To assess whether the trend and the results continue to be replicated today, it should be applied to other types of organizations and/or sectors, as well as other countries and/or regions. This would allow to deepen the study from an academic point of view and contribute to the improvement of communicative practices at the digital level of organizations from a professional point of view.

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