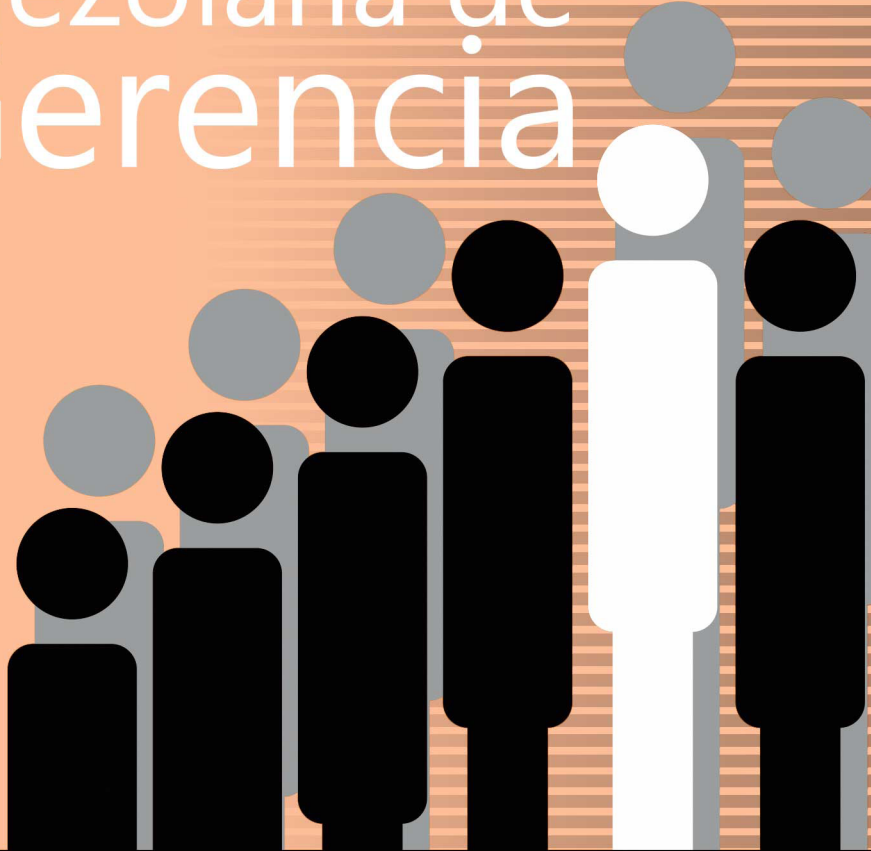


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COVID-19 Crisis Communication in Tourist Destinations in the Basque Country and Valencian Community

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Abstract

It is crucial to understand how tourist destinations in Spain handled social media communication during the health crisis in order to assess its effectiveness and learn from the strategies implemented. This study describes the crisis management and communication of Spanish tourist destinations during the pandemic through their social media profiles, focusing on “Turismo Euskadi” and “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana”. A content analysis of the social media profiles (Twitter) of tourist destinations was used. The research revealed that tourist destinations in Spain prioritized informative and crisis communication on their social media profiles during the pandemic. The findings highlighted the importance of empathetic and effective social media communication to manage crises in tourist destinations during the pandemic in Spain.

Keywords: crisis communication; tourist destinations; COVID-19; tourism; Twitter.

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COVID-19 Comunicación de crisis en destinos turísticos del País Vasco y la Comunidad Valenciana

Resumen

Es crucial entender cómo los destinos turísticos en España manejaron la comunicación en redes sociales durante la crisis sanitaria para evaluar su efectividad y aprender de las estrategias implementadas. Este estudio describe la gestión de crisis y comunicación de destinos turísticos españoles durante la pandemia a través de sus perfiles en redes sociales, enfocándose en “Turismo Euskadi” y “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana”. Se empleó un análisis de contenido de los perfiles en redes sociales (Twitter) de destinos turísticos. La investigación reveló que los destinos turísticos en España priorizaron la comunicación informativa y de crisis en sus perfiles de redes sociales durante la pandemia. Las conclusiones destacaron la importancia de la comunicación empática y efectiva en redes sociales para gestionar crisis en destinos turísticos durante la pandemia en España.

Palabras clave: Comunicación en crisis; destinos turísticos; COVID-19; turismo; Twitter.

1. Introduction

The spread of the Covid-19 pandemic virus quickly became a global health emergency crisis that affected a large part of economic sectors and impacted many areas of society with high virality. This unprecedented situation demanded rapid and effective responses from governments and organizations around the world. In particular, the tourism sector was affected early on due to the government measures implemented to curb the spread of the virus: social distancing, restricted border crossings, mobility control and various barriers that prevented the free movement of citizens and travel.

In Spain, an economy highly dependent on tourism, the restrictions

imposed during the pandemic had a devastating impact. Tourism activity, spanning accommodation, transport, catering and leisure, experienced a drastic decline, threatening numerous jobs and regional economic stability. The prolonged lockdown and mobility limitations increased uncertainty among both travellers and stakeholders in the tourism sector. With the increasing use of social media and the internet during lockdown, it is crucial to analyse how crisis communications were handled in order to understand their impact and develop effective strategies for future emergencies.

The Basque Country and the Valencian Community are two regions in Spain with a significant dependence on tourism, although with different

characteristics and dynamics. While the Basque Country is known for its cultural, gastronomic and historical offering, the Valencian Community stands out for its beaches and sun and sand tourism. Both destinations had to quickly adapt to the new reality imposed by the pandemic, managing crisis communication to maintain the confidence of tourists and minimize the economic impact. The objective of this research is to describe how the regional tourism administrations of the Basque Country and the Valencian Community managed their crisis communication during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The importance of crisis communication in the tourism sector during a pandemic lies in the need to keep tourists informed, manage the reputation of the destination and ensure effective coordination between the different stakeholders. Proper communication management can influence public perception and the post-crisis recovery of the sector. This study provides a comparative overview between two major tourist destinations in Spain, contributing to knowledge on best practices in crisis management and offering valuable lessons for future health emergencies.

2. Communication, management and impact of crises on tourism

Prior to 2019, tourism experienced continuous expansion and diversification, with a robust and high-growth industry (UNWTO, 2021). Since the mid-20th century, international tourism grew exponentially, surpassing 25 million domestic tourists and reaching 678 million in 2000 and 950 million in 2010

(Nieto et al, 2016). However, at the end of 2019, the outbreak of Covid-19, a serious respiratory disease, halted this trend. The pandemic, unprecedented in its global reach, caused an unparalleled disruption to tourism, with a drastic drop in activity and a complete standstill of international travel (UNWTO, 2011). In 2020, cross-border travel decreased by 73%, being the “worst year in the history of the tourism industry” (UNWTO, 2022). UNWTO (2021) identified tourism as the most affected economic segment, with numerous companies and agencies closing due to the crisis.

Although the tourism sector has shown resilience in the face of economic fluctuations, conflicts and terrorism, the severity and scope of Covid-19 created an unprecedented situation (Castello, 2020). The tourism sector is particularly vulnerable due to the uncertainty caused by recurrent business closures and constant border restrictions. Abella (2020) explains this vulnerability in terms of basic needs being met and reduced requirements for travel. Demand for tourism services decreases with travelers’ purchasing power, which dropped during the lockdowns and crisis. Lack of mobility, imposed for confinement, exacerbates this vulnerability.

Castello (2020:115) discusses that Covid-19 created conditions for a “renewed landscape for relearning in the global industry”. Massive changes and debate about their effects led to reactions such as “overtourism” and “tourismophobia”. The inability to plan and changing restrictions on travel habits deeply affected global economies. The sector’s organisations adopted a reactive approach, adapting to the new environment and formulating procedures aligned with emerging trends during the crisis (Corzo and Guatibonza, 2021).

The pandemic interrupted the successful trajectory of tourism in Spain, recognised by the World Economic Forum as the most competitive country in tourism (TURESPANA, 2020). Madrid, as the capital of tourism since 1975, also suffered the effects of the crisis (Vallejo, 2015). Spain adapted to mitigate the effects of the crisis, ranking second in tourist activity (Muniz, 2022). In 2019, the tourism sector accounted for 154 billion euros, 12.4% of GDP, and generated 2.72 million jobs, 12.9% of the total in Spain (INE, 2020). That year, Spain received 82 million international visitors, a historical record (Statista, 2022). In 2020, this trend was reversed with a 71% drop in visitors and a 5.5% decrease in GDP (INE, 2022).

The Spanish Tourism Administration must maintain its leadership and face the challenge of a post-COVID-19 recovery, essential for the national economy (TURESPANA, 2020). The immediate priority is to establish safe tourism, aligned with health regulations (Bauza and Melgosa, 2020). Once this safety is assured, communicating it effectively to travelers is crucial.

Communication is fundamental in organizational management. Bernard highlights that the organizational structure depends on communication tactics (Padilla & del Aguila, 2002). Katz and Kahn (1999) state that communication defines social and organizational systems, while Costa (1995) compares it to the neural system of an organization. Strategic communication is now seen as a key tool for image and reputation management, linked to organizational objectives (Padilla & del Aguila, 2002). An effective strategy must involve all relevant agents, ensuring that decisions do not generate conflicts with stakeholders. Identifying and understanding the

expectations of these groups facilitates positive relationships. The organization must plan communication standards that reflect a cohesive image and an integrated corporate strategy (del Aguila & Padilla, 2002).

Corporate communication, within the strategy, structures the messages directed to different interest groups, covering internal and external communication (del Aguila & Padilla, 2002). Andrade describes corporate communication as a planned and systematic set of internal and external messages that integrate the institution with its publics, using marketing and public relations tools (Martín, 2006). A Communication Plan is essential for an integrated strategy. Fernández (2011) defines the Strategic Communication Plan as the synthesis of the company's culture and vision, programming its practical application. This plan organizes communication activities aligning them with the company's objectives and strategic vision (Fernández, 2011). Martín (2006) underlines the importance of the Communication Plan also focusing on making itself known and meeting growth expectations.

Finally, any Communication Plan and Strategy must include crisis management, providing a framework for handling negative situations (Fernández, 2011). According to Carrillo et al. (2009), 95% of organizations face crises that threaten their continuity and require adaptation to overcome disruption. González-Herrero (1997) defines a crisis as a situation that threatens the organization's objectives, alters its relations with the public and demands extraordinary intervention to minimize negative consequences, increasing management stress. Carrillo et al. (2009) describe a crisis as an unexpected

situation that generates internal and external instability. If not managed properly, it can lead to the closure of the organization, but a well-managed crisis can strengthen the brand and improve credibility and reputation (Martín, 2006). Therefore, planning crisis management in advance is crucial to reduce or eliminate negative effects on the company's image and reputation.

Authors propose key elements to characterize a crisis, considering inherent risk, avoidability, circumstances, control factors, and organizational response (González-Herrero, 1997). In a health crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the event is external and beyond the company's control, so the organizational image is not inherently affected (Coombs, 2012, in Candel, 2020). Crisis communication management must anticipate possible accidental crises and implement mechanisms to minimize their impact (González-Herrero, 1997). When a crisis breaks out, it is crucial to react quickly from the organizational side, as the initial response time defines public perception and protects business reputation (González-Herrero, 1997: 17).

A comprehensive corporate communication plan establishes a standard framework for crisis management. In the current context, a communication plan must be adapted to the digital environment, where the Internet facilitates multidirectional communication (Candel, 2020). This digitalised environment requires a common approach and universal participation during a crisis (Huertas, Oliveira, & Giroto, 2020). Social media, especially Twitter, are fundamental in crisis communication due to their interactive nature and ability to reach a wide audience instantly (Huertas et al, 2020; Emre et al, 2016). Twitter allows

for fast and effective communication that can manage and mitigate crisis situations in a more controlled manner than other traditional media such as newspapers and online blogs (Huertas et al, 2020).

Companies and institutions adapted their communication strategies during the pandemic, facing a crisis of confidence. In the tourism sector, following the state of emergency and confinement measures, tourists are looking for safe and peaceful destinations for their holidays. The changes during the emergency led to a focus on tourist interactions on safety and security measures. To regain momentum in tourism, provincial authorities and companies in the tourism sector prioritized institutional messages focused on the health and protection of customers (Toscano, 2020).

This shift towards strategy and institutional communication was based on several key premises. First, crisis communication was prioritized over sales promotion and advertising, aligning with brand identity, public relations, and corporate social responsibility (Zaldivar & Gutierrez, 2020). Second, there was a pressing need for more human and empathetic communication during crisis management, relegating the commercial aspect to the background (INCIS, 2021). Finally, there was a constant adaptation of tactics to attract and retain customers as companies returned to operating under more normal conditions (Carlsen Strategy & Communication, 2020).

During the pandemic, news snapshots emerged as a crucial strategy to counter the crisis of confidence, especially in the initial phase characterized by a high rate of contagion. The preference for information platforms over commercial content was consolidated, highlighting the importance of offering reliable information to

mitigate fear and uncertainty. This need underlined the importance of clear, concise and trustworthy platforms (Zaldivar & Gutierrez, 2020).

In the tourism context, Toscano (2020) observed how news snapshots became a competitive advantage, providing up-to-date information on health initiatives and safe services in various provinces, thus strengthening public trust. The increase in internet use during confinement placed this channel as a leader in communication with audiences, with social media being especially effective due to its ability to spread short messages with great impact (ORH, 2021). Oscar Sánchez from Tech Sales Communication highlighted the importance of branding to quickly adapt messages and maintain relevance in new digital channels, focusing on the quality of the content (ORH, 2021).

In terms of emerging digital strategies, Bello (2021) identified several significant trends. These include the holding of live conferences to establish a direct connection with audiences, the use of visual presentations and immersive content to quickly inspire and connect, a growing interest in hybrid events that combine in-person and virtual modalities, and increased collaboration with influencers, driven by the rapid growth of social media during the lockdown period.

In the tourism sector, emotionally charged content was key to offering virtual experiences in specific destinations, thus supporting the continuity and updating of travel information (Toscano, 2020). Furthermore, Zaldivar & Gutierrez (2020) highlighted tools such as functional videos, IG reels and live broadcasts on Instagram as preferred digital tactics in this sector. During the pandemic, positive and empathetic communication, focused on sensitive and accessible issues

for the general public, strengthened trust and interactivity in corporate communications (Toscano, 2020). The solidarity underlying the Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) discourse during the crisis showed an additional commitment to society and stakeholders (Bemypartner, 2021).

Crisis experiences renewed the human approach in personal relationships, highlighting communicative actions based on storytelling that add empathy and sympathy to interactions (Toscano, 2020). Another relevant trend was the use of local content, especially in the tourism sector, where communicating in the language and valuing local stories increased connection and trust, especially among local travelers due to travel restrictions (Bello, 2021). This facilitated more effective and targeted communication towards market niches defined by their familiarity with the destination (Toscano, 2020). During the crisis, accessible and available services played a crucial role in addressing public concerns through consultations and open lines of communication, actively using social media for more relational and participatory interaction (Toscano, 2020).

3. Methodology

During the health crisis in Spain, the Valencian Community and the Basque Country were selected as case studies due to their active participation on Twitter during the critical period, from November 3, 2020 to June 21, 2020. 3,200 tweets were collected from these regions using Twitonomy, which facilitated a detailed analysis of public campaigns and specific marketing metrics. This data provides a significant and comparable sample, with other regions reporting similar figures

of around 185 to 192 entries. The study focused on the initial period of the crisis, from March 11, 2020, when the WHO declared a global health emergency, until June 21 of the same year, when the first wave of infections in Spain was considered controlled. This time frame reflects the response of the population to the protective measures adopted by the government, in a context of high concern about the rapid global spread of the virus. This period marked a significant shift towards home confinement, an unprecedented measure in Spanish history.

The methodological design focuses on a content analysis of tweets collected between November 3, 2020, and June 21, 2021. Tools such as Twitonomy will be used for data collection and social media analysis. The type of analysis will be qualitative, focused on coding and categorizing tweets according to relevant topics related to public health measures, prevention advice, case updates, and

solidarity messages, among others.

“Turismo Euskadi” (@i_Euskadi) and “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana” (@c_valenciana) are the main content promoting agencies highlighted in this study. By focusing on the communication areas from their official platforms originating from Twitter, our approach is guided by the previous analysis of Huertas et al, (2020) of “Communication management of crisis of the national tourist offices of Spain and Italy in the face of COVID-19”, a method of crisis communication analysis that resonates with the Spanish scenario described.

Taking as a reference the method developed by Huertas, Oliveira and Giroto (2020) from previous research in the area of crisis management and Twitter, this source document offers an initial approximation to address the questions and offers an analysis of the communications from the period from March 11 to June 21, 2020 (Table 1).

Table 1
Method for content analysis

| Date | |
|--|--|
| Origin | [retweet] [retweet from] |
| Category | Subcategory |
| 1) Communication crisis Covid-19 management | 1.1) Communication Crisis 1.2) Communication Crisis and for Stakeholders |
| | 1.2.1 Management not impacting Tourist segment. 1.2.2 Management impacting Tourist segment. 1.2.3. Management for Tourist and Crisis Covid-19 |
| 2)Communication for PR Tourist Content | |
| Resources | Graphics (Text, gifs, emoticon) Video (animated, audio-video) Interactive (link, hashtag, tags) |
| Engagement | Likes Shares |

Source: Huertas et al, (2020).

During the closures, in addition to messages addressed to the public, communications that promoted tourist destinations were highlighted, reinforcing their visibility through comments and highlights specific to the tourism sector. The date of the tweets provided crucial data to evaluate the immediate response to the crisis through a communication plan.

To distinguish between original tweets from agencies and retweets involving other entities, a differentiating approach was adopted that expanded engagement and added value in regional and provincial areas. Regarding the classification of graphic resources and visual posts, graphic pins, audiovisual content (videos, animated gifs) and interactive links, hashtags and tags were considered. Finally, to evaluate user interactions with tweets retrieved from @i_euskadi and @c_valenciana between March 11, 2020, and June 21, 2020, Twitonomy was used. The data was processed in Excel and supplemented with additional graphics and statistics, resulting in a final sample of 377 tweets, 185 from the Basque Country and 192 from the Valencian Community.

4. Crisis communication in tourist destinations

Below are the results of the tweets and data collected from the official Twitter accounts “Turismo Euskadi” (@i_euskadi), known as “Visit Euskadi”, and “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana” (@c_valenciana) for the dates of the Covid-19 virus pandemic (11/3/2020) and the end of the declaration of the Emergency Law (21/6/2020).

When analyzing the sources of the posts and tweets, it is observed that neither of the agencies published

content related to the Communication Crisis on their Twitter. What is noticeable is an effort by both Tourism agencies to communicate about the management of the crisis and notices to interested parties. Approximately half of the tweets published (45.6%) present information in these categories and, as highlighted, tourism content specifically related to Covid-19 (28.1%).

Specifically, 37.3% of tweets originating in the Basque Country are dedicated to crisis communication and warnings to interest groups. To this end, Turismo Euskadi has used different resources. Most of the management related to tourism, 20.5%, provides information on protocols, health measures and specific guidelines adapted by the Department of Tourism, Commerce and Consumption of the Basque Government. It should be noted that the vast majority of tweets include links to additional information and expanded access to complete reports on protocols. Some of the messages revolve around the security measures added by tourism agents to adapt to the security and protection protocols against Covid-19.

Additionally, the País Vasco portal expanded the information that linked tourist alternatives to offer other experiences that don't rely in physical movement, restricted at the time due to expected confinement and health related measures to contain the spread. For instance, the posts share content relative to virtual visits to museums, and monuments, videos and graphic material with feature regional landscapes, live broadcasts, Vasque origin food recipes, etc. with the aim of easing the time spent indoors and share the experiences via remote access to visits for other regions to be able to enjoy this regional charms.

Any closures and re-openings were notified via twitter as well as support and encouragement to overcome the hard times during the crisis.

With less occurrence, Visit Euskadi posted their management activities directly relating to tourist, a 17.3% of tweets. Within this category, the messages providing support and encouraging all audiences to comply with the recommendations from health authorities in order to contain the spread are posted in parallel to those informing of specific measures taken in the sector. Finally, those messages focusing on rules and guidelines that foster agents in the tourist sector.

The agency in País Vasco published questions unrelated to tourism less occurrence, only a 1.6%, in the content of 3 posts detailing steps for online shopping.

From the side of "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana", half of their tweets are dedicated to crisis management and notices to stakeholders, with a 53.6%. These posts are communicating initiatives toward tourism management during times of crisis, a 34.4%; and, general matters impacting tourism as an economic sector, 33.8%. Unlike the País Vasco originated content, the tweets arising from Comunidad Valenciana are fewer in number when posting about general points unrelated with economic activity.

Within this subcategory in communication crisis, when it is pertinent to the tourist sector, Comunidad Valenciana shares in the form of touristic experiences and alternatives such as, virtual tours, photos and video for showcasing towns and other feature points of interest in the region, as well as, activities for entertainment and traditional cooking recipes, online events, etc;

these online inserts offer multimedia support at the same time that provide an incentive to stay indoors. Also, the specific attractions are representing a message of better times to inject a sense of optimism in the hard times, during the emergency crisis. Some of the tweets indicating the need to maintain safety in health and protection from a decision-making standpoint, for individuals, are focusing on the interests specific to tourists and relating to practical travelling information.

In the subcategory around general matters affecting the tourist sector, the highlights and great majority of the post point to security measures and the need to maintain social distancing and residential confinement, aligning with health authorities, and taking a stand for their own local and provincial government, to enhance the benefits awaiting for the reopening. Some of the tweets can be identify with de-escalating or dephasing of safety measurements with presence of central government recommendations in beach access and events cancelation for emergency act declaration, as it happened with occasion of the known gathering Fallas de Valencia in 2020. It is remarkable the use of hashtags #QuédateEnCasa and #YoMeQuedoEnCasa in many of the posts from both agencies.

Finally, by focusing in the category PR for tourist destination, both areas, Turismo Euskadi and Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana widely used these formats and resourced to graphic and visual appeals in 79.4% and 78.1% respectively.

In the case of País Vasco images and video content with the natural beauty in the area and activities and plans for trekking, rural sightseeing, family friendly areas for visiting. Visit Euskadi shares

historical biz and curiosities around monuments and villages, traditional sports, for some of their featured content. It is worth mentioning that a great number of tweets in this category offer an appeal to diverse audiences and engaged for taking action and planning a wish list by using the #sitiosquevisitar topic (in this way the options are suggested via another theme #Basquexperience). Most of the posts include a link to connect with the central tourist agency (<https://turismo.euskadi.eus/es/>).

As part of the community, agency of Tourist at Comunidad Valenciana, the resources and media are varied and promotional materials enhance the sight of geographical areas of interest, cities, towns, coastal areas, heritage, cultural roots, quality of natural environments and parks, including beach sections and many options for widely portraying the natural beauty and historical roots. Specifically, there are areas of content that are identifying tourist attractions and linking these to anecdotes and pieces of story relative to Valencia to highlight its diversity and make the point of destination more appealing.

To analyze the timing of crisis communication in two destinations, the date of the tweets is verified, since it is essential information to assess crisis communication; according to Coombs (1998, cited by Huertas, Oliveira, & Giroto, 2020), the speed of the communicative reaction is a success factor in crisis management. The different reaction chains from the official declaration of pandemic alert (WHO March 11, 2020).

Thus, it has been verified that "Turismo Euskadi" reacted faster to the crisis than "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana" with content directly related to Emergency just one day

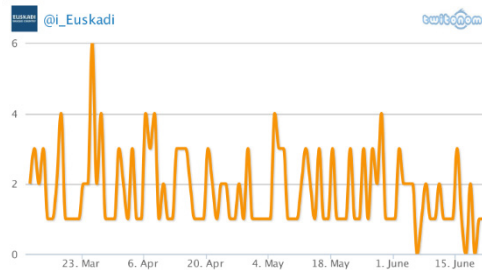
after the declaration of the pandemic, on March 12. It should be noted that it did so in two retweets from the account "Departamento de Turismo, Comercio y Consumo del Gobierno Vasco"; this agency reported the on the extraordinary effort and personnel held to address the crisis to tourism sector and the adoption of a specific protocol and initiatives.

However, "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana" waited four more days to comment on the matter, sharing its first tweet in relation to the COVID-19 pandemic on March 16 (two days after the start of the Emergency state in Spain). However, unlike "Visit Euskadi", they did it with a tweet directly sourced from health authorities, requesting followers to be responsible in the face of critical times and to respect home confinement government measures.

In addition, as can be seen in Graphs 1 and 2, both accounts remain quite active during the selected period, something that is positive considering that communication silence is not appropriate in times of crisis. In fact, Schmetz and Novak (1987, cited by Xifra, 2020) established the communicative principle "silence is not profitable", whereby saying nothing constitutes a global strategic error in corporate communication (Xifra, 2020).

Although it is true that the Comunidad de Valencia account has a relatively less active phase in the period between March 15 and 31 (publishing from one to no tweets per day), the accounts have a very similar flow, reaching their peak volume with 6 tweets published (on March 25, in the case of "Turismo Euskadi", and April 28, in the case of "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana") and an average of 1,80 (Pais Vasco) and 1,88 (Comunidad de Valencia) tweets per day in the study period.

Graphic 1 Amount of tweets in @i_euskadi by date

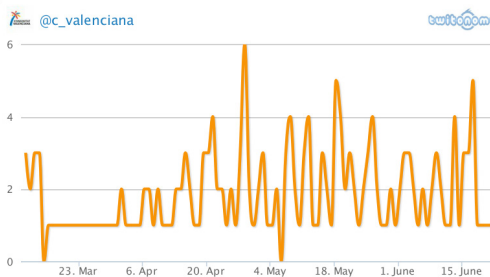


Source: Twitonomy (2024).

It is also noticeable that “Turismo del País Vasco” is more active during the first half of this period - included until May 2 (beginning of the de-escalation in Spain) and coinciding with the toughest phase of confinement -, with 1,94 tweets/day compared to 1,68 tweets/day in the

Comunidad de Valencia. On the contrary, “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana” is more active as of May 2, a phase in which progress is made towards the new normality, publishing 2,12 tweets/day compared to 1,63 tweets/day in “Turismo del País Vasco”.

Graphic 2 Amount of tweets in @c_valenciana by date



Source: Twitonomy (2024).

The initial line of distinction between tweets and retweets from lateral agencies it is seen the degree of comitment from administrations in the Tourism areas of Pais Vasco and Comunidad Valenciana during the communicatin crisis stage; their main role as primary sources of

information affected directly the sector (Fowler, 2017; Granville; Mehta; Pike, 2016, in Huertas et al, 2020).

It is shown in table 2 that the majority of tweets posted in both accounts proceed from own stock, to a 62.1%. However, in order to asses

the degree of involvement in the crisis communication, we look in more detail to the tweets containing direct allusion to pandemic virus. In this area, the tweets under “management of crisis and communication about pandemic virus”, are glossed in table 3, where it is seen that the Comunidad Valenciana

had an active role as a primary source of information, with a 62.5% directly touching on Covid-19 matters. The Pais Vasco agency shows a neutral stand and shares own tweets in balance with retweets from other entities, 49.3% to 50.7%.

Table 2
Source of tweets

| | General | | País Vasco | | C. Valenciana | |
|---------|---------|------|------------|------|---------------|------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Tweet | 234 | 62.1 | 114 | 61.6 | 120 | 62.5 |
| Retweet | 143 | 37.9 | 71 | 38.4 | 72 | 37.5 |
| TOTAL | 377 | | 185 | | 192 | |

By taking into consideration the overall tweets in this category on crisis management, it comes across that the official accounts share more tweets

on their own elaboration, 55.8% than retweets, 44.2%, for a positive outlook in the communication crisis.

Table 3
Source of tweets in crisis communication around management and covid-19.

| | General | | País Vasco | | C. Valenciana | |
|---------|---------|------|------------|------|---------------|------|
| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
| Tweet | 96 | 55.8 | 34 | 49.3 | 62 | 60.2 |
| Retweet | 76 | 44.2 | 35 | 50.7 | 41 | 39.8 |
| TOTAL | 172 | | 69 | | 103 | |

The communication resources used by the accounts in each tweet are classified into: (i) graphics (text, image, emoticon), (ii) audiovisual (animated image, audio-video) and (iii) interactive (link, hashtag, tag users), taking into account that, according to Capriotti, Zeler and Oliveira (2019, cited by Huertas et al, 2020), videos are the format that generates the most engagement among tourists.

The results collected in Table 4

show that both tourist accounts present similarities in terms of the use of communication resources. Graphic and interactive resources are undoubtedly the most used by both accounts to spread their messages on Twitter (more than 96% of tweets). Within the graphic resources, the text with emoticons predominates in the account of the Pais Vasco and the text with an image in the profile of the Comunidad Valenciana. As for the interactive resources, the

links succeed in the account of the Pais Vasco, while the hashtags do so in that of the Comunidad Valenciana. On the other hand, as can be seen in Table 4,

audiovisual resources are used in a very minor way by both accounts, being present only in around 15% of their tweets.

Table 4
Media resources

| | # | % | # | % | # | % |
|-------------------|-----|------|-----|------|-----|------|
| Graphic resources | 377 | 100 | 185 | 100 | 192 | 100 |
| Interactive | 368 | 97.7 | 182 | 98.4 | 186 | 96.9 |
| Audio-visual | 58 | 15.4 | 31 | 16.7 | 27 | 14.1 |
| TOTAL | 377 | | 185 | | 192 | |

The results linking to the level of engagement are shown in table 5, for a total 7,066 likes and 1,858 shares from followers. The messages in the Pais Vasco account obtained 1,146 likes representing an average 10.32/tweet; Comunidad Valencia gathered less traction with 5,920 likes, measuring to an average 48.52 response in tweets. For measuring shares, also "Turismo

Euskadi" generates 384 shares (4.09/tweet) versus "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana" for 1.474 shares (12.93/tweet). One remark affecting the tracking of engagement is the total number of followers, around 126,000 in Comunidad Valencia, and, only, 15,000 in Pais Vasco, which presents a higher level of engagement.

Table 5
Reactions from audiences

| | Likes | Shares | Average Likes/tweet | Average shares/tweet |
|----------------------|-------|--------|---------------------|----------------------|
| <i>Pais Vasco</i> | 1,146 | 384 | 10.32 | 4.09 |
| <i>C. Valenciana</i> | 5,920 | 1,474 | 48.52 | 12.93 |
| TOTAL | 7,066 | 1,858 | | |

It is worth recalling that the highest engagement pieces of content were not displaying Covid related information and merely promoting the destination, similarly for both geographical destinations.

The results indicate differences in the content of the tweets between the tourism portals analysed. "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana" dedicates more than half of its tweets (103) to informing about the management of the

COVID-19 crisis and the protection of interest groups, while "Turismo Euskadi" does so to a lesser extent (69 tweets). This suggests a greater commitment by the Valencian tourism administration to support and inform tourists during the state of alarm, crucial in the face of the crisis of confidence generated by the pandemic and the concern for health among travellers. Both destinations prioritise promotional communication in almost 80% of their tweets, despite

theoretical recommendations suggesting limiting promotion during crises to focus on information about the pandemic and its management. In addition, “Turismo Euskadi” reacted more quickly by publishing two tweets just one day after the official declaration of a pandemic by the WHO, highlighting this factor as crucial for effective communication during crises. “Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana”, in comparison, showed a later response and an initially passive level of activity, although both maintained a constant presence without phases of communicative silence, contrary to what was observed in other brands negatively affected by the crisis (Xifra, 2020).

Likewise, we can positively assess the involvement of these two tourist destinations in crisis communication as primary sources of information, since this study confirms that, in general, they shared more messages related to the pandemic of their own elaboration than of retweets from other accounts. It is worth mentioning the more active role adopted by the tourism account of the Comunidad de Valencia, whose tweets in relation to COVID-19 are mostly of its own elaboration; since the account of País Vasco is quite neutral, sharing practically the same number of own tweets as retweets.

It has been found that both accounts made little use of audiovisual resources (around 15% of their tweets), perhaps missing an opportunity to obtain greater impact since, as mentioned above, videos are the format that most engages generates among tourists (Capriotti, Zeler and Oliveira, 2019, cited by Huertas et al, 2020). In addition, another interesting remark that can be drawn from the study of the most used hashtags is that it is corroborated that the Comunidad Valenciana is more involved

in communicating the COVID-19 crisis (something already revealed by the analysis of the contents), since its three most used hashtags directly alluded to the pandemic.

Finally, the research also shows that publications out of “Tourism of the Valencian Community” obtained many more reactions than those of “Turismo Euskadi”. However, it cannot be said that this is due to the fact that they published more tweets about the management of the coronavirus, nor that the public showed greater interest in this topic on Twitter, since the two tweets that generated more support in each of the accounts belonged to the category of communication to safeguard the image of the destination as a tourist attraction, i.e. tourism promotion. Similarly, it cannot be said that the public were not interested in the subject, since among the tweets with the most reactions some have been identified in allusion to the pandemic.

5. Conclusions

This study recommends that tourism administrations in Autonomous Communities affected by health crises adopt a proactive role in disseminating content on crisis management and protection of stakeholders on social media. During crises, adequately informing tourists is crucial for tourism sector stakeholders to effectively manage the situation and offer support in difficult times. It is essential to prioritize informative messages over promotional ones to build trust and mitigate uncertainty in the early stages of the crisis. In addition, responding quickly after the start of the crisis is crucial to maintaining a positive image and solid reputation of the tourist destination. It is suggested to maintain active and

constant communication during the crisis and take advantage of the engagement potential offered by audiovisual resources, especially videos.

In methodological terms, this study was limited to the analysis of one social network, Twitter, although suitable for crisis communication, it would be beneficial to extend the comparison to other platforms such as Instagram and Facebook. It also faced the limitation of data availability from other geographic regions of Spain due to the extent of the work and the time required to collect and analyze additional data. Future research could explore crisis communication on Instagram and Facebook of "Turismo Euskadi" and "Turismo de la Comunitat Valenciana", as well as expand the analysis to other Autonomous Communities. In addition, it would be interesting to compare communication on social media with communication in traditional media to identify differences in the treatment of topics and content.

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