

# Promoting Pharmaceutical Companies' Reputation through Facebook: the case of Spain

**Pablo Medina Aguerrebere**

Assistant Professor. Canadian University Dubai. United Arab Emirates. ORCID: [0000-0002-4463-4721](https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4463-4721).

**Toni González Pacanowski**

Assistant Professor. University of Alicante. Spain. ORCID: [0000-0003-3005-2218](https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3005-2218).

**Eva Medina**

Researcher. University of Alicante. Spain. ORCID: [0000-0001-6276-4127](https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6276-4127).

[pablo.medina@tud.ac.ae](mailto:pablo.medina@tud.ac.ae), [toni.gonzalez@ua.es](mailto:toni.gonzalez@ua.es), [ec90@alu.ua.es](mailto:ec90@alu.ua.es)

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## Abstract

This paper aims to analyse how the 100 most reputed pharmaceutical companies in Spain use Facebook for improving their corporate reputation. To do that, on the one hand, we carried out a literature review about corporate communication, health organizations and social media; and on the other hand, we analysed their Facebook corporate profiles by using ten indicators related to corporate communication. This paper concludes that pharmaceutical companies in Spain does not consider Facebook any more like a strategic tool for their corporate communication strategies because only 18 companies manage actively a Facebook corporate profile from their headquarters in Spain.

## Key words

Corporate Communication, Reputation, Social Media, Health organizations, Pharmaceutical Companies.

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## 1. Introduction

During these last years, most health organizations around the world have had to reinvent their corporate communication strategies in order to better satisfy new stakeholders' demands. Health organizations' employees as well as patients, media companies and public authorities are increasingly interested in issues related to health education and prevention. Besides, they need to better understand why these health organizations' activities are useful for individuals and society. On the other hand, most stakeholders have also integrated a new communication logic based on new principles like instantaneity, transparency, feedback and content-oriented communications. Moreover, the financial crisis of traditional media and the increasingly reduced budgets for communication activities in health organizations have led these last ones to focus their corporate communication in social media. This paper aims to analyse how health organizations in Spain use social media for improving their corporate reputation. To do that, we carried out a literature review about corporate communication in health organizations (interpersonal, internal and external communication), brand architecture (identity, values, mission, vision and culture) and social media. And next, we analysed the Facebook corporate profile of 100 most reputed pharmaceuticals companies in Spain by using 10 indicators related to corporate communication. Finally, we proposed some ideas for improving their online corporate communication strategies.

## 2. From health communication to online reputation

Health organizations consider corporate communication like a strategic issue (Househ, Borycki & Kushniruk, 2014). Public hospitals, private clinics, pharmaceutical companies, health authorities, patients' associations and health insurance companies prioritize the professional management of corporate communication in order to better interact with their stakeholders, like media, clients or employees (Medina Aguerrebere, 2017). According to Van Riel and Fombrun (2007: 25), corporate communication is "the set of activities involved in managing and orchestrating all internal and external communications aimed to creating favourable starting points with stakeholders on which the company depends". Health organizations should understand corporate communication like a global concept involving several activities, like marketing, public relations, events or organizational communication (Mazzei, 2014). The main objective of corporate communication is to manage and spread internally and externally the organization's identity and its brand image (Frandsen, Johansen, 2013). In health organizations, corporate communication experts assume three main professional functions: a) interpersonal communication, b) internal communication and c) external communication (Medina Aguerrebere, 2017).

The interpersonal communication established between health organizations and their stakeholders (employees, media companies, public authorities, etc.) determines stakeholders' attitudes toward the first one (Archipoli et al., 2016). In order to improve the organization's efficacy, they should invest more money and time for helping their health professionals to also become experts in interpersonal communication (Jahromi et al., 2016). Thanks to interpersonal communication, health organizations can improve stakeholders' participation in the health system

(Chan et al., 2016), which improve their satisfaction with organizations' products and services (Al-Abri & Al-Balushi, 2014).

Besides the interpersonal communication, health organizations should also manage the internal communication established with employees and other internal stakeholders (suppliers, etc.). According to Welch and Jackson (2007), internal communication involves all communication initiatives led by managers for promoting stakeholders' engagement as well as their sense of belonging to the organizations. Thanks to internal communication, health organizations can spread corporate information that help employees to do efficiently their job (Rodrigues, Azevedo & Calvo, 2016). Disseminating some inputs like identity, vision or mission could also influence positively in the promotion of the internal corporate culture (Pelitti, 2016).

Health organizations also consider the external communication like a useful management tool for better interact with external stakeholders, like patients, public authorities or medias (Martini, 2010). Health organizations should constantly analyse new stakeholders' attitudes and adapt their communication strategies in order to efficiently promote the stakeholders' engagement with the organization (Moser & Greeman, 2014). Health organizations should also measure the impact of all communication initiatives in order to prove that this professional activity involves a real value for the company (Zerfass & Viertmann, 2017).

Most health organizations have their own Corporate Communication Department in charge of all interpersonal, internal and external communication activities. This department's main responsibility is to build a strong brand that helps the company to develop their business (Esposito, 2017). Organizations need to measure constantly their brand's impact in all stakeholders and, according on that, adapt their communication strategies (Veltri & Nardo, 2013). The professional management of a brand involves the definition of five corporate elements: identity, values, mission, vision and culture (Medina Aguerrebere, 2017).

Corporate identity refers the organization's essence and it is closely related to the organization's business strategies (He & Balmer, 2013). Organization's values are corporate inputs more accurate than identity that help employees to better understand the organization's logic and do efficiently their job (Sheehan & Grant, 2014). These values should highlight the human and ethical side of organizations in order to create a real engagement with stakeholders (Ortega & Sastre, 2013). Besides identity and values, health organizations should also define mission, vision and culture. According to Cady et al. (2011), the mission establishes a middle-term objective and proposes practical ways to help employees to apply this corporate element in their daily work. The vision establishes a long-term objective and proposes several ways to help the organization to achieve it (Singal & Jain, 2013). Finally, the internal culture refers to the unique way of working that allows a company to be different from its competitors (Nelson, Taylor & Walsh, 2014).

After having defined the brand architecture (identity, values, mission, vision and culture), health organizations should establish a communication strategy based in a quantitative evaluation system whose main objective is to spread these corporate elements among all internal and external stakeholders. Branding actions are strategic to promote the organization's reputation (Medina Aguerrebere, 2017). Health organizations need to reinforce their reputation in order to adapt to the changing context in which they interact (Kemp, Jilipalli & Becerra, 2014). Thanks to these

branding actions, these organizations can reinforce their credibility and their reputation (Martini, 2010). Corporate reputation influences directly in the organization's functioning: for example, in the hospital context, reputation can influence patients' choices (Tengilimoglu et al., 2007). Moreover, when hospitals are reputed organizations, patients and their family think these organizations propose a safe and professional environment (Mira, Lorenzo & Navarro, 2014). Branding actions have become a priority for health organizations interested in building a reputed company (Wang et al., 2011).

Branding through social media has become a strategic priority for health organizations interested in improving their corporate relationships with internal and external stakeholders (Fischer, 2014). The impact of social media in revitalising health organizations' relationships with stakeholders has led several authors to affirm that these platforms are the most important tool in health communication (Griffis et al., 2014). Nevertheless, these companies should solve some security problems related to social media, like confidentiality, usability and identity management (Househ, Borycki & Kushniruk, 2014). Thanks to social media, health organizations like hospitals or pharmaceutical companies can improve the making decision process established between patients and health professionals (Lim, 2016). The professional management of social media for improving relationships with stakeholders involves three main aspects: a) health organizations should spread accurate corporate information in each social media (McCarroll et al., 2014); b) these organizations should establish an innovative knowledge management system in order to use the stakeholders' feedback to improve the health services (Bubien, 2015); and, finally, health organizations must also use social media for better understand patients' behaviours and expectations (Rozenblum & Bates, 2013).

From a corporate communication point of view, social media have become a powerful tool to improve the health organizations' reputation (Liu et al. 2014). These companies use increasingly social media platforms like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram or LinkedIn to build active brand communities that influence stakeholders' perceptions (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013). Since 2005, one of the social media most used by these organizations for improving their corporate reputation is Facebook. Five realities can justify this sentence: a) the professional management of Facebook allows health organizations to develop different health education initiatives, which help them to reinforce their brand credibility (Glover et al., 2015); b) the corporate information spread through Facebook influences positively in the stakeholders' engagement with the organization (Richter, Muhlestein & Wilks, 2014); c) most patients want to use Facebook to communicate with health professionals when having doubts or questions, which is useful for improving patients' perceptions about the organization's employees (Lee et al., 2015); d) patients can share in a corporate Facebook profile different information about their personal experiences, which reinforces the brand community built by the health organization (Hays, Page & Buhalis, 2013) and; e) Facebook proposes several applications to evaluate the stakeholders' satisfaction with health organizations' services, like for example the likes number (Timian et al., 2013).

### 3. Methodology

This paper aims to understand how health organizations use *Facebook* to promote their corporate reputation. To do that, we have focused on the pharmaceutical companies because - unlike hospitals, clinics, health authorities, health insurance companies and patients' associations-, these organizations, since many years ago, invest every year a great amount of money in advertising, public relations and corporate communication initiatives in order to reinforce their corporate reputation. We have analyzed the Spanish's most reputed pharmaceutical brands, which are ranked every year by *Merco*, one of the most important reputation audit companies in the world.<sup>1</sup> In 2018, the ranking about the 100 top pharmaceutical brands in Spain was led by *Novartis*, *Pfizer*, *Sanofi*, *Jansen* and *Roche*.<sup>2</sup>

Our main objective is to know if the Spanish pharmaceutical companies consider *Facebook* like a strategic corporate communication tool. In other words, do these companies spread through *Facebook* all corporate elements concerning their brand (identity, values, mission, vision and culture)? To do this study, we have only analyzed the corporate *Facebook* profile, and not those profiles made by some particular departments belonging to the pharmaceuticals companies. Concerning global brands, we have analyzed the Spanish company's *Facebook* profile, and, when they did not have an active profile, we have analyzed the global company's *Facebook* Profile. In order to analyze these profiles, we have focused on the "About" section and we have used ten indicators related to corporate communication<sup>3</sup> (Table 1).

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<sup>1</sup> Since 2000, *Merco* (*Monitor Empresarial de Reputacion Corporativa*) analyzes the reputation of thousands of brands around the world. To do that, they use a multistakeholder methodology based on six evaluations indicators and 25 qualitative and quantitative sources of information. They apply this methodology to eight different rankings (Companies, Leaders, Corporate Government, Talent, Talent in University's Students, Consumerism, Digital and MRS) in twelve countries (Spain, Portugal, Argentina, Mexico, etc.). *Merco* is the first monitoring company in the world to be audited every year in order to guarantee accurate results. To know more about the *Merco*'s methodology: <http://www.merco.info/es/que-es-merco>.

<sup>2</sup> According to *Merco*, in 2018 the top 100 pharmaceutical brands in Spain were: 1) *Novartis*, 2) *Pfizer*, 3) *Sanofi*, 4) *Jansen*, 5) *Roche*, 6) *Lilly*, 7) *Bayer*, 8) *MSD*, 9) *Astrazeneca*, 10) *GSK*, 11) *Abbvie*, 12) *Merck KgaA*, 13) *Menarini*, 14) *Esteve*, 15) *Boehringer Ingelheim*, 16) *Rovi*, 17) *Amgen*, 18) *Kern Pharma*, 19) *Ferrer*, 20) *Chiesi*, 21) *Ipsen Pharma*, 22) *Almirall*, 23) *Gilead Sciences*, 24) *Novo Nordisk*, 25) *Bristol Myers Squibb*, 26) *Abbott*, 27) *Servier*, 28) *Astellas Pharma*, 29) *Baxter*, 30) *Allergan*, 31) *Celgene*, 32) *Leo Pharma*, 33) *Italfarmaco*, 34) *Sandoz*, 35) *Normon*, 36) *Nestle*, 37) *UCB*, 38) *Takeda*, 39) *Fresenius-Kabi*, 40) *Grifols*, 41) *Grunenthal*, 42) *Biogen*, 43) *Faes Farma*, 44) *Teva Pharma*, 45) *Cinfa*, 46) *Leti*, 47) *Mylan*, 48) *Lundbeck*, 49) *Angelini*, 50) *Adamed*, 51) *Alk-Abello*, 52) *Otsuka*, 53) *Isdin*, 54) *Ordesa*, 55) *B. Braun*, 56) *Daiichi Sankyo*, 57) *Shire*, 58) *Laboratorios Salvat*, 59) *Industrial Farmaceutica Cantabria*, 60) *Zambon*, 61) *Thea*, 62) *Pierre Fabre*, 63) *Ferring*, 64) *Eisai*, 65) *Casen Recordati*, 66) *Meda Pharma*, 67) *Alexion Pharma*, 68) *Norgine*, 69) *Mundipharma*, 70) *Altan Farma*, 71) *Gebro Pharma*, 72) *Vifor Pharma*, 73) *Alter*, 74) *Diater*, 75) *Biomed*, 76) *Bial Industrial*, 77) *Stallergenes*, 78) *Laboratorios Vinas*, 79) *Brill Pharma*, 80) *Tedec Meiji Farma*, 81) *Smith and Nephew*, 82) *Medtronic Biopharma*, 83) *Insud Pharma*, 84) *Bioiberica*, 85) *Gedeon Richter*, 86) *Vertex*, 87) *Bausch & Lomb*, 88) *Aldo Union*, 89) *Viiv Healthcare*, 90) *Reig Jofre*, 91) *Santen*, 92) *Biomarin*, 93) *Rubio*, 94) *Galderma*, 95) *Ern*, 96) *Ratiopharm*, 97) *Lacer*, 98) *Inmunotek*, 99) *Uriach* and 100) *Stada*.

<sup>3</sup> We have carried out this analysis from 7th September 2020 to 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2020.

Table 1

**Indicators related to Corporate Communication**

Communication domain	Indicator
Corporate identity	1. Company's description 2. Links to other corporate websites 3. Company's history 4. Foundation date
Values	5. Values description
Mission	6. Mission description
Vision	7. Vision description
Culture	8. Health products 9. Corporate awards
Image	10. Logo like main image

Source: Own elaboration.

**4. Results**

Most health organizations use social media for disseminating corporate information related to their brand (identity, value, mission, vision and image). According to their organizational needs, they establish different online communication strategies for improving their reputation. In order to better understand how pharmaceutical companies in Spain use social media for ameliorating their reputation, we have carried out an analysis about their corporate profile on Facebook. According to our results, out of 100 most reputed pharmaceuticals companies in Spain, 57 have an active corporate profile on Facebook. Nevertheless, we must outline that out of these 57 companies, 23 do not have a local profile managed by the company in Spain, but a global profile managed by the company's headquarter in another country (United States, France, Germany, etc.). Furthermore, out of these 57 companies, there are also 16 organizations whose Facebook corporate profile not only is managed by the company's headquarter in another country but also is not linked to the company's website in Spain.

Out of 57 pharmaceutical companies having a corporate profile on Facebook, most of them respect only some indicators. According to the Table 2. Number of respected indicators, no company applies ten indicators, 38 companies apply between four and six indicators, and 87,72% of companies respect less than seven indicators. Only four organizations respect eight indicators (Roche, Amgen, Servier and Bial Industrial) and three companies apply seven indicators (Novartis, Leo Pharma, and Smith and Nephew).

Table 2

**Number of respected indicators**

Number of indicators	Number of companies
10	0
9	0
8	4
7	3
6	15
5	14
4	9
3	7
2	5
1	0
0	43

Source: Own elaboration.

Table 3

**Overview about indicators**

Communication domain	Indicator	Percentage
Corporate identity	1. Company's description	87,72%
	2. Links to other corporate websites	100%
	3. Company's history	49,12%
	4. Foundation date	70,18%
Values	5. Values description	0%
Mission	6. Mission description	47,36%
Vision	7. Vision description	0%
Culture	8. Health products	29,82%
	9. Corporate Awards	10,53%
Image	10. Logo like main image	96,49%

Source: Own elaboration.

Concerning the brand architecture, and only considering these 57 companies having an active Facebook profile, most pharmaceutical companies disseminate different inputs to influence

stakeholders' perceptions about their brand. Most companies respect the indicators related to the corporate identity – links to other corporate websites, foundation date and company's description- and the image –logo like main image in the Facebook profile-. Nevertheless, they do not respect the indicators related to values and vision (see Table 3).

## 5. Discussion

During several years, most health organizations had considered Facebook like a strategic tool for their corporate communication initiatives. According to several authors, Facebook is a useful tool for improving reputation and ameliorating relationships with stakeholders, especially with patients. Tsimonis and Dimitriadis (2014) consider that for companies interested in having full interactive communication with stakeholders, having a Facebook corporate profile is more appropriate than a corporate website. According to Gage-Bouchard et al. (2016), Facebook is a useful platform for helping patients share medical information and interact with health organizations. Moreover, Hutter et al. (2013) claim that Facebook is an essential tool for promoting branding. However, since several years, other authors had also published some papers about the Facebook's inefficiency like professional tool for corporate communication initiatives. For example, according to Huang and Dunbar (2013), Facebook is not a useful tool for improving corporate interactions with stakeholders because these last ones are not active in this social media, what represents a real problem for companies. Van der Verlden and El Eman (2013) claim that most young people do not like to use Facebook to disseminate their health personal information and interact with health organizations. Finally, according to Miller and Tucker (2013), health organizations very often cannot monitor conversations in Facebook, what constitutes a risk from a communication point of view.

Data obtained in this research show that most reputed pharmaceutical companies in Spain do not consider Facebook anymore like a strategic tool for their corporate communication initiatives. Three facts allow us to affirm this statement. Firstly, 43% of analyzed companies do not have a corporate profile on Facebook, but it does not mean that they do not use other social media. In fact, most of them have a corporate profile on Twitter and Youtube. More and more people use Youtube because they prefer to consult videos instead of texts, especially videos about health education issues (Huang, 2013). Secondly, no company disseminates information about its values and vision, what prevents stakeholders to fully understand these companies' brand architecture. Disseminating fully corporate information is essential to help the organization build a brand community and establish efficient relationships with its stakeholders (Laroche, Habibi & Richard, 2013). And thirdly, out of 57 companies, 39 use a global profile managed by the company's headquarter in another country; in other words, out of 100 companies analyzed in this study, only 18 companies manage actively a Facebook corporate profile. According to Huesch, Currid-Halkett and Doctor (2014), stakeholders evaluate health organizations' reputation by using different criteria, like for example the kind of information they disseminate in social media. That is why, for most pharmaceutical companies in Spain, their actual approach for managing Facebook could become a risk for their corporate reputation.



Social media have become a powerful tool for corporate communication initiatives (Park, Rodgers & Stemle, 2013). However, most Spanish pharmaceutical companies cannot be present in all social media platforms. That is why these organizations should implement an online strategy allowing them to reduce the risk of taking some decisions concerning the choice of social media platforms, the kind of content to post, the integration strategies between all social media platforms and the corporate website, etc. Nowadays, even if most health organizations prefer to use social media focused on image and videos like Youtube and Flick'R (Rando Cueto & de las Heras Pedrosa, 2016), these organizations can also integrate Facebook in their global social media strategy. After all, Facebook can become a useful tool for improving stakeholders' engagement with health organizations (Glover et al., 2015).

Despite the data obtained in this analysis, we can identify some limitations, like for example the lack of information concerning the social media strategies followed by these organizations, the available resources they have for digital communication (time, budgets and people) as well as the kind of information they disseminate in other platforms like Youtube or Flick'R. Researchers interested in this domain can go in depth in this kind of social communication through analyzing how these companies use Youtube, Twitter, Twenti, Flick'R, Instagram or even mobile applications for disseminating their brand architecture.

## 6. Conclusion

Managing efficiently social media for improving companies' reputation has become a priority for most health organizations around the world. They have to reinvent their corporate communication strategies, and to do that, they need to focus their communication in these new platforms. Nevertheless, this digital transformation represents a true challenge for most organizations. After having analysed how the 100 most reputed pharmaceutical companies in Spain use Facebook for disseminating their brand architecture (identity, values, mission, vision and culture) and considering the literature review carried out about these concepts, we can conclude this text with three last ideas. Firstly, most pharmaceutical companies in Spain do not consider Facebook any more like a strategic tool for their corporate communication initiatives, that is why only 57 have an active corporate profile on Facebook, and out of these 57 companies only 18 organizations manage actively this Facebook corporate profile from their Spanish headquarter. Secondly, no pharmaceutical company in Spain disseminates all brand architecture elements, what represents a reputation risk because stakeholders cannot understand the brand's essence. And thirdly, health organizations should consider recruiting experts in online corporate communication in order to implement tailored initiatives allowing these companies to better build their corporate reputation through social media.

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