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Digital reputation as a strategy for transforming military organisations

Abstract

The key objective of the public relations strategy of any military organisation is to win the trust of its target audiences. To achieve this, it is essential to devote attention to and continuously improve its reputation. The digital medium, in which organisations are subject to constant scrutiny and which demands immediacy, astuteness and consistency, also has a major influence on the offline world. Therefore, digital reputation becomes a strategic issue in relations with all of the organisation's audiences.

In the Reputation Age, the use of digital reputation as a public relations strategy in military organisations is a necessary and essential process which has long-term effects and which must be planned. It has a transformative effect on the talent of an organisation and is capable of effecting changes in the corporate culture, thus adapting the organisation to the demands of today's digital society.

Keywords

Reputation, Trust, Legitimacy, Public Relations, Military Organisations, Transformation, Digital Reputation.

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Introduction

In today's world, changes are taking place at a dizzying speed, driven largely by advances in technology. This situation of constant change, transformation and uncertainty, to which we are forced to adapt, has made it increasingly difficult to arouse interest, and surprise and attract audiences.

The information overload generated by the Internet and new technologies has caused people's attention span for ordinary content to drop and they now seek out more selective and reliable information. Therefore, capturing their interest and providing credibility have become essential for organisations aiming to convey any kind of message.

The importance of communication for public bodies in a global and constantly changing environment is evident from the extraordinary development of political and institutional communication at all levels in recent years.

Today, it is beyond question that all organisations, including the government and public bodies and institutions, need public relations¹, and that an organisation where there is no communication between the people comprising it and between these and the public is inconceivable².

Nowadays, taking a no-communication approach is no longer an option, as silence is also a form of communication, as well as a risk, because we leave it up to others, whose intentions and interests may not coincide with those of the organisation, to distribute unreported information. Institutions are always communicating, even when they say nothing³, and it is advisable to communicate «even bad news and what our logic tells us not to communicate»⁴.

In addition, the phenomenon of «fake news» creates mistrust and makes us aware that not all filters and evaluations are useful to us. We have generated the need to believe certain sources of information and not believe others which, in reality, makes us depend on other people, most of whom we do not know. In order to quickly detect which sources can be trusted, society uses a system, where the information perceived

1 GRUNIG, James E. and HUNT, Todd. *Dirección de Relaciones Públicas*. [trad.] Adelaida Santapau. Barcelona: Ediciones Gestión 2000 S. A., 2003, pp. 58-59 (The original title is *Managing Public Relations*).

2 CARRETÓN BALLESTER, María del Carmen. *Las relaciones públicas en la gestión de la comunicación interna de la banca española*. La Coruña: Netbiblo 2007, p. 16.

3 RAMÍREZ, Txema. *Gabinetes de comunicación: funciones, disfunciones e incidencia*. Barcelona: Bosch 1995.

4 LORENZO SOLÁ, Francisco. *Las relaciones públicas en la estrategia de comunicación de la Guardia Civil de Alicante: aplicación de modelos conductuales*. Alicante: University of Alicante, 2013. Doctoral thesis, p. 25.

and communicated about an individual or group of individuals precedes our interaction with them, called reputation.

We are thus experiencing a transformation where information will have value only if it is already filtered, evaluated and commented upon by others. As a result, reputation has become a central pillar of collective intelligence and we are moving from the «information age» towards the «reputation age»⁵.

All organisations are confronted with greater risks every day. Global Risk Management Survey 2019 identified damage to reputation as the second biggest risk confronting an organisation, after economic recession⁶.

We can still recall Volkswagen's reputational crisis after the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency exposed the falsification of nitrogen oxide emissions data in a number of vehicles between 2009 and 2015 or that of Samsung after cases of exploding batteries in its Galaxy Note 7 phone model were reported.

In the digital environment, Media Markt was plunged into an online reputational crisis after it published some unfortunate tweets in relation to the Spanish armed forces parade on 12 October 2013, which immediately attracted strong online criticism.

Reputation, therefore, has become an indispensable intangible asset for organisations, and caring for and tending to it has taken on strategic proportions.

Thus, this asset, which is becoming increasingly valuable in financial terms, is a necessity for any organisation intending to convey information to their stakeholders and engage individuals within the organisation, given that organisations and people cannot engage in conversation without first having an institutional reputation.

No organisation can afford to be involved in a reputational scandal which, after creating social and media alarm, might find itself the subject of harmful regulation as an improvised and opportunistic response by the corresponding regulator. The only way to avoid these situations is to anticipate them and plan through communication.

Therefore, the big challenge for organisations is to manage public trust and reputation in the face of changing consumer behaviour and the new habits of an ever more digital citizenry⁷, given that the widespread availability of Internet access inevitably

5 ORIGGI, Gloria. «Say goodbye to the information age: it's all about reputation now». *Aeon Ideas*. [Published online 14 March 2018]. [Cited on 29 March 2019]. <https://aeon.co/ideas/say-goodbye-to-the-information-age-its-all-about-reputation-now>.

6 AON Empower Results. *Global Risk Management Survey 2019*. [Published online 2019]. [Cited on 20 June 2019]. https://www.aon.com/2019-top-global-risks-management-economics-geopolitics-brand-damage-insights/index.html?utm_source=aoncom&utm_medium=2017-grms-popup&utm_campaign=grms2019.

7 CORPORATE EXCELLENCE - Centre for Reputation Leadership and CANVAS. «Estrategias sostenibles». *Approaching the Future 2019. Tendencias en Reputación y Gestión de Intangibles*. Madrid: s. n., 2019.

means that a significant portion of conversations between organisations and their audiences take place online or, in other words, in the digital environment.

Furthermore, in these times of constant social scrutiny, «Society demands a greater ethical commitment and greater control and involvement in the responsible governance of public and private organisations from the side of public decision-makers»⁸.

In the so-called digital society, military organisations cannot be an exception. Their target audiences cannot be excluded from digital contact, whether transactional or conversational, online or offline, most especially when you consider that they provide a service to the entire population.

Our aim is to demonstrate the appropriateness, usefulness and, indeed, the necessity of building a digital reputation as part of the public relations strategy in order to win the trust of the various target audiences of military organisations.

We will begin by defining some basic concepts, which will allow us, within the framework of public relations, to demonstrate how reputation can be used as a management tool for building trust⁹, how it affords organisations significant strategic advantages and how it is under permanent development. We will then transfer what we have learned to the digital environment, highlighting the main characteristics of digital reputation and how it can transform organisations.

Basic concepts

Public Relations

It is an indisputable fact that communication is based on different types of relations¹⁰. What we call public relations involves different corporate processes which, through communication, seek to interpret ideas and information in order to improve target audiences' perceptions of the organisation and, in short, its image and reputation, and engage with these audiences with the aim of winning their trust¹¹.

8 GARCÍA-GUIU LÓPEZ, Carlos. «Ethical leadership and responsible management as levers for improvement in security, emergency and defence organisations». *Journal of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE)*, No. 9. Madrid: Ministry of Defence 2017, p. 369.

9 ALLOZA LOSANA, Ángel. *La economía de la reputación: un nuevo modelo de gestión empresarial*. Harvard Deusto Business Review, Vol. 2011. December 2011, pp. 44-53.

10 CARRETÓN BALLESTER. *Op. cit.*, p. 16, states that communication «is possible because of the relationships it creates and which it in turn generates».

11 This conclusion was reached by combining the following classical definitions of public relations: GRUNIG and HUNT. *Op. cit.*, p. 52, pointed out that communication is the task of everyone in the organisation and defined it as «managing communication between an organization and its publics». CUTLIP, Scott M. and CENTER, Allen H. *Effective Public Relations*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978, p. 5, include the institutional environment and the concept of interpretation, and define these

On this point, the members of the Public Relations Society of America unanimously agree that «Public relations is a strategic communication process that builds mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and their publics»¹².

Basically, the aim of public relations is very clear: to create awareness of the organisation and build good relations with the business's various publics by building up a good corporate image¹³, i.e. causing the public to have a positive perception of the organisation.

To achieve this, and as a first step in corporate communication, the organisation must clearly define its target audiences¹⁴, i.e. groups of individuals who, due to similar circumstances, have common behaviour patterns, and know how to engage with them. These targets have common defining characteristics: they are specific, homogeneous, have a common problem¹⁵ and, as mentioned previously, behave similarly.

It should be noted that each organisation generates its own targets and that, in turn, each particular situation generates priority and secondary target audiences¹⁶; therefore defining the target audience is extremely important in any communication process.

Of the five general objectives of public relations¹⁷, the first three focus on building credibility and trust, the fourth on monitoring *reputation* and the fifth, as we will ex-

as «the communication and interpretation of ideas and information to the publics of an institution; the communication and interpretation of information, ideas and opinions from these publics to the institution in an effort to bring the two into harmonious adjustment».

WILCOX, D.; AULT, P.; AGEE, W. & CAMERON, G. *Relaciones públicas. Estrategias y tácticas*. 6ª. Madrid: Pearson Education S. A. 2001, p. 6, which reflects the definition of the Public Relations Society of America, when it states that it is the effort to «maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and all its publics».

12 PUBLIC RELATIONS SOCIETY OF AMERICA. A Modern Definition of Public Relations. *PRsay. The voice of Public Relations*. [Published online 1 March 2012]. [Cited on 12 February 2019]. <http://prsay.prsa.org/index.php/2012/03/01/new-definition-of-public-relations/>.

13 Based on the definition of: KOTLER, P.; ARMSTRONG, G.; CÁMARA IBÁÑEZ, D. and CRUZ ROCHE, I. «Marketing». *Décima*. Madrid: Pearson Educación, S. A., 2004 and ACED, Cristina. *Relaciones Públicas 2.0. Cómo gestionar la comunicación corporativa en el entorno digital*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC 2013.

14 *Publics* are defined as «an active social unit consisting of all those affected who recognise a common problem for which they seek common solutions», according to Dewey's definition cited in: CUTLIP, Scott M.; CENTER, Allen H. and BROOM, Glen M. *Manual de Relaciones Públicas Eficaces*. Barcelona: Ediciones Gestión 2000, 2006, p. 390.

15 GRUNIG and HUNT. *Op. cit.*, p. 58.

16 CAPRIOTTI, Paul. *Planificación Estratégica de la Imagen Corporativa*. 4ª. Málaga: Instituto de Investigación en Relaciones Públicas, 2013, pp. 48-49.

17 CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 105, highlight the five objectives of Public Relations:

1. Build credibility and trust between the company and external audiences.
2. Build credibility and trust between the company and internal audiences.

plain in more detail, on creating legitimacy. In short, this discipline is concerned with «managing the reputation of a company among its target audiences»¹⁸.

Creating trust, through ethics and values that create fluid relationships between organisations and their target audiences, thus allowing for smooth and astute communication, appears to be instrumental in an organisation's communication strategy.

Trust

Broadly speaking, by trust we mean «a firm belief in someone or something»¹⁹. A more specific definition of trust would be «the expectation, that arises within a community, of regular, honest and cooperative behaviour based on commonly shared norms, on the part of other members of that community»²⁰.

Luhmann describes trust as a *social relationship*, and sees it as an effective system for reducing the complexity of the environment in which we live²¹. Taking it as an indisputable fact that our environment is becoming increasingly complex, trust becomes extremely important in our social life, to the point that it becomes fundamental to almost every action, relationship and transaction²².

Indeed, we could say that trust is the catalyst that enables relational interactions between individuals or groups of individuals based on their past social behaviour.

However, this much-needed trust is not something that is easily won, or which can be improvised. «It is slow and hard to earn but easy to lose. It takes earnestness and perseverance and... years»²³. It can only be earned when open and free spaces for communication are created to connect people with common interests²⁴.

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3. Continue to maintain the two previous objectives while increasing our network of business contacts with new target audiences, and design new programmes.
 4. Design a crisis strategy to address new situations and public opinion. Be attentive to any rumours circulating among the public.
 5. Evolve as society changes and give them what they expect of us at all times.

18 ACED. *Op. cit.*, p. 35.

19 The Royal Spanish Academy. *Diccionario de la Lengua Española*. [Online]. [Cited on 2 July 2019]. <https://dle.rae.es/?id=AF8rq9a>.

20 FUKUYAMA, Francis. *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity*. New York: Free Press Paperback 1995, p. 26.

21 LUHMANN, Niklas. *Confianza*. Rubí (Barcelona): Anthropos Editorial, 2005.

22 BOTSMAN, Rachel. *Who can you trust? How Technology Brought Us Together - and Why It Could Drive Us Apart*. s.l.: Portfolio Penguin, 2017.

23 BASSAT, Luis. *El libro rojo de la publicidad (ideas que mueven montañas)*. Barcelona: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial S. A. U., 1993, p. 38.

24 FERNÁNDEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 3.

Furthermore, certain elements have to be taken into account when building trust, such as credibility, which is required for the development of strategic corporate communication²⁵, legitimacy and, especially, reputation, which, in turn, includes image and identity.

Legitimacy

An organisation's responsibilities²⁶ stem from what the organisation has the obligation to do or, more subjectively, what the different target audiences expect of the organisation. The concept of legitimacy is based on this idea and consists of how target audiences judge the actors, activities and results of an organisation in relation to the norms, values and expectations they have of it²⁷.

Therefore, it can be said that an organisation has legitimacy when its actions are consistent with society's expectations²⁸, in other words, when they are perceived as 'desirable, proper or appropriate within some socially constructed system of norms, values, beliefs, and definitions'²⁹.

This intangible asset provides a financial and social benefit for any organisation, especially those belonging to the Public Administration, and creates value for the public, such as trust³⁰.

Reputation

Reputation and trust are two closely related concepts, considering that the first paves the way for the second and that both facilitate our development in the social

25 CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 116.

26 In GRUNIG and HUNT. *Op. cit.*, p. 116, an organisation's responsibilities can be classified into three categories:

1. The performance of basic tasks.
2. The organisation's concern for the consequences of its activities for external groups.
3. The organisation's concern for solving general social problems.

27 ROBLES López, Carmen María. *La reputación y la legitimidad como bienes intangibles en el sector público. El caso del ministro y el Ministerio de Educación, Cultura y Deporte (2011-2015)*. Madrid: Complutense University of Madrid, 2016. Doctoral thesis, p. 37.

28 DE QUEVEDO PUENTE, E., DE LA FUENTE SABATÉ, J. M. and DELGADO GARCÍA, J. B. «Reputación corporativa y creación de valor. Marco teórico de una relación circular». *Investigaciones Europeas de Dirección y Economía de la Empresa*, vol. 11, 2. 2005, pp. 81-97.

29 SUCHMAN, M. *Managing legitimacy: Strategic and Institutional Approaches*. *Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20. New York: s.n., 1995, pp. 571-610, p. 574.

30 *Ibíd.*, p. 44.

environment. Therefore, because we know that a good corporate reputation allows organisations to gain a great deal of *trust* from all stakeholders³¹, it can be concluded that only organisations «that continuously strive to maintain and improve their reputation will be able to build trust»³².

Reputation, i.e. what others say about us³³, can be considered «a positive sentiment towards a person or an institution that incorporates three vectors: admiration, esteem and *trust*»³⁴.

In an organisational context, corporate reputation can be defined as the *perception* that the various stakeholders of an organisation have of the organisation. These perceptions are shaped by how the organisation has behaved over time and describe its capacity to distribute value among its stakeholders³⁵.

While it can also be described as the widespread perception that the organisation «demonstrates legitimacy in its relations with stakeholders, both in terms of behaviour and information transparency»,³⁶ the most widely accepted definition in the public relations sector is the definition provided by the Corporate Reputation Forum and the Reputation Institute, namely, «the set of perceptions that the various internal and external stakeholders that interact with the company have of the company based on how the company has behaved over time and its capacity to distribute value to these stakeholders»³⁷.

The way to build a good corporate reputation is to work on «the perception each stakeholder has of the organisation»³⁸ by defining a genuine and appropriate pur-

31 GARICANO ROJAS, Tomás. *El Gobierno corporativo y la reputación corporativa*. Investigaciones y Publicaciones del Centro de Gobierno Corporativo. Centro de Gobierno Corporativo, 2011, pp. 79-132, p. 84.

32 CORPORATE EXCELLENCE - Centre for Reputation Leadership & CANVAS. *Estrategias sostenibles*. *Op. cit.*, p. 21.

33 WALLER, David and YOUNGER, Rupert. *The Reputation Game. The Art of Changing How People See You*. London: Oneworld Publications 2017, p. 7.

34 CARRERAS, Enrique; ALLOZA, Ángel and CARRERAS, Ana. *Reputación corporativa*. Madrid: LID Editorial S. L. 2013, p. 30.

35 CORREDERA, Julián and GONZÁLEZ, Marcos. *Diccionario LID. Responsabilidad y sostenibilidad*. Madrid: LID Editorial Empresarial 2011.

36 DE QUEVEDO PUENTE, DE LA FUENTE SABATÉ and DELGADO GARCÍA. *Op. cit.*, p. 83.

37 DE SALAS NESTARES, María Isabel and MONSERRAT GAUCHI, Juan. *La reputación corporativa como instrumentos de articulación en la gestión de la organización*. FISEC-Estrategias, Vol. Año VI. Faculty of Social Sciences, National University of Lomas de Zamora, 2011, pp. 37-59, p. 42.

38 MARTÍNEZ-ALONSO, M. A. *Plan Estratégico de Comunicación para el ISFAS. Una propuesta concreta*. Alicante: University of Alicante, 2014. Master's Dissertation.

pose, having good management, being efficient and having a real and demonstrable impact³⁹. Accordingly, reputation is a means of enhancing *trust* and the *credibility* of the organisation in the eyes of its stakeholders, and of communicating more effectively⁴⁰.

For his part, Capriotti, who sees image and reputation as a basic common concept, defines it as a cognitive structure of the target audience, the result of information consumption by individuals, which gives rise to a mental structure of the organisation that is capable of generating evaluations and behaviours⁴¹.

«Institutions and people have always employed communication as an element of power and to build a good image among their audiences»⁴². Image, as we have seen, is a key aspect of communication and, hence, of public relations. Moreover, it plays a pivotal role in building an organisation's reputation, given that a positive image in the eyes of the public will eventually become a good reputation⁴³.

Corporate image can therefore be defined as the «set of meanings that a person associates with an organisation». However, this does not mean that each organisation has only one image; on the contrary, there may be different types of images: company image, brand image and product image⁴⁴.

In short, an organisation's image is the mental structure that «target audiences form of the organisation after processing all information relating to the organisation»⁴⁵. Thus, in order to achieve a strong and successful result, the image projected must be «consistent with the organisation's real identity, in other words, its way of being and acting»⁴⁶ and it must be based on corporate identity⁴⁷.

39 VILLAFANE & ASOCIADOS. Interview with V&A. María Ruiz Pacheco, Director of Consulting. *Villafañe & Asociados Consultores*. [Published online 12 December 2018]. [Cited on 17 February 2019]. <http://villafane.com/entrevista-maria-ruiz-pacheco/>.

40 LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ, David. «Identidad y reputación de carácter digital: repercusión de los medios sociales». *Paakat: Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad*, 2. University of Guadalajara (Mexico). March-August 2012, p. 3.

41 CAPRIOTTI, Paul. «De la imagen a la reputación. Análisis de similitudes y diferencias». *Razón y Palabra*, vol. 14, 70. Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education. November-January 2009, pp. 1-10.

42 LORENZO SOLÁ. *Op. cit.*, p. 12.

43 GARICANO ROJAS. *Op. cit.*, pp. 79-132.

44 MÍNGUEZ, Norberto. «Un marco conceptual para la imagen corporativa». *ZER - Revista de Estudios de Comunicación*, Vol. 5, 8. Bilbao: University of the Basque Country 2000, p. 5.

45 CAPRIOTTI. *Planificación Estratégica de la Imagen Corporativa. Op. cit.*, p. 29.

46 GARICANO ROJAS. *Op. cit.*, p. 89.

47 VILA LÓPEZ, Natalia. «La gestión integral de la imagen de marca en el sector sanitario». [In] Asunción Hernández Fernández and José María Martínez García. *Marketing sanitario. Evolución - Revolución*. Madrid: ESIC Editorial 2014, p. 184.

Digital reputation

Today, the Internet makes it possible for anyone to express his or her opinion about anything and anyone and for that opinion to be disseminated. Widespread access and use of the Internet has made us all opinion formers, judgement passers and information creators. In this context, public relations has adapted to and become part of the digital environment and, while the basic principles of public relations have not changed, it has taken on specific characteristics.

Therefore, online communication is an important instrument for public relations experts because the Internet presents certain key aspects such as global reach, the fact that its content is not subject to any type of controls and information tracking is more thorough and immediate⁴⁸.

In addition, the difference between the online and offline environment is that electronic word of mouth is more «infectious, rapid and persistent», hence communication in this environment must be faster and more precise⁴⁹.

All these circumstances mean that the concept of *perception management* in traditional public relations has become *trust building* in public relations 2.0. In other words, the traditional idea of *persuasion* has become *trust building* in the digital world. Hence, the practice of public relations 2.0 focuses on communicating values and ethics as an absolute concept in the organisation⁵⁰.

In short, public relations 2.0 is «an assumed attitude and the use of a set of applications spawned by the information society which enable one-to-one communication with organisations' communities; and which encourage the creation of experience and content»⁵¹.

This digital medium is primarily made up of social media which «weave a new utopian and imaginary social fabric through the immediacy of contact» and which constitute a «virtual market where the symbolic value of one's own –ever-under-construction– identity is auctioned, frequented by peers who come to forge closer ties, on the one hand, and to share knowledge of the environment on the other»⁵². In the

48 WILCOX, AULT, AGEE and CAMERON. *Op. cit.*, p. 278.

49 LEIVA-AGUILERA, Javier. *Gestión de la reputación online*. Barcelona: Editorial UOC 2012, p. 17.

50 FERNÁNDEZ, Matias. «Relaciones Públicas 2.0». *Razón y Palabra*, Vol. 11, 52. Monterrey Institute of Technology and Higher Education. August-September 2006, pp. 3-4.

51 SILVA ROBLES, Carmen and ELÍAS ZAMBRANO, Rodrigo. «Relaciones Públicas 2.0 (y educación). ¿De qué hablamos realmente? Un acercamiento conceptual y estratégico». *Fonseca, Journal of Communication*, 3. University of Salamanca 2011, pp. 72-96.

52 PIÑUEL RAIGADA, José Luis. «Redes sociales, discursos y crisis de reputación». [In] José Luis Piñuel Raigada and Jérôme Ferret. *e-Reputación. La construcción de la reputación on line y su vulnerabilidad*. Salamanca: Comunicación Social Ediciones y Publicaciones 2016, p. 1.

social media, which is open to everyone, all types of opinions and judgements are expressed and remain there to be viewed by any other user and even virally distributed and shared infinitely if they meet the necessary conditions.

In this context, when the reputation construct is confined to the digital medium, it is called online reputation, digital reputation or, as French authors prefer to call it, *e-réputation*. However, there is really «only one corporate reputation, and online reputation is an expression of the public's recognition of a company in online, digital and social media»⁵³.

In relation to the digital medium, online reputation can be regarded as the value achieved by an organisation through the use or misuse of the opportunities afforded by the Internet⁵⁴ and is a direct result of appropriate management of digital identity to create virtual image⁵⁵.

In general, Capriotti describes the concept of reputation as a construct of reception, as he sees it as a mental representation or perception. However, when the concept refers to the digital environment, it takes on a strategic role in communication, becoming a set of actions to be performed and behaviours to be publicised, and this has more to do with the construct of transmission because it becomes a corporate management tool that acts on all target audiences⁵⁶.

Digital reputation affects all targets equally because of the permeability brought by the globality and accessibility of social media and it can be damaged (franchises may be in jeopardy and goodwill may be eroded) among those with access to Internet messages⁵⁷, i.e. among all targets, precisely because of the universality of the medium.

Consequently, although corporate reputation runs along two converging paths (the online and the offline), it is considered that digital reputation transcends the online medium, in other words, the Internet impacts both the online and offline worlds⁵⁸.

Furthermore, as mentioned previously, all organisations are constantly communicating, whether intentionally or not, beginning with their staff, which gen-

⁵³ VILLAFANE & ASOCIADOS. Villafañe & Asociados Consultores. *Reputación Corporativa. Villafañe & Asociados Consultores*. [Published online 2019]. [Cited on 17 February 2019]. <http://www.villafane.com/reputacion-corporativa/>.

⁵⁴ LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ, David. «Identidad y reputación de carácter digital: repercusión de los medios sociales». *Paakat: Revista de Tecnología y Sociedad*, 2. University of Guadalajara (Mexico), March-August 2012.

⁵⁵ SILVA ROBLES and ELÍAS ZAMBRANO. *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-96.

⁵⁶ CAPRIOTTI. *De la imagen a la reputación. Análisis de similitudes y diferencias. Op. cit.*, pp. 1-10.

⁵⁷ CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 491.

⁵⁸ LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

erates a particular external public opinion. This is why it is so important that the image conveyed to the external public is the same as the image held by the internal public⁵⁹ and why taking care of an organisation's talent becomes extremely important.

Accordingly, virtual reputation management becomes a key way for companies to inspire trust⁶⁰ and inevitably emerges as a strategic element in an organisation's public relations mix.

If you examine the process of transformation that is currently taking place, you will notice that «as the economy becomes digitised, trust evolves because new ways of building, receiving and showing it become necessary. One of the most anticipated developments in this new digital space will be to see how trust is transformed into online reputation»⁶¹.

Digital reputation as a strategy

Public relations or (corporate) communication in an organisational context has become «an indispensable tool for conveying the vision, mission and values set in the organisation's overall strategy to all stakeholders»⁶². Achieving a good reputation by forging a positive image and garnering widespread social recognition⁶³ is, likewise, the public relations goal of any organisation.

Firstly, organisations need to be aware that their reputation, which is continually being built, is not entirely under their control because what is said about them originates from other individuals or groups, whose intentions are unknown to the organisation. In the reputation age, where the digital medium reigns supreme because of its globality, immediacy and accessibility, no organisation's overall strategy can afford to overlook reputation management. It can therefore be concluded without a shadow of a doubt that «online reputation and digital identity are strategic concerns for every organisation»⁶⁴.

The proper use of reputation as a public relations strategy can bring important competitive advantages, such as fostering a spirit of cooperation and company val-

⁵⁹ CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 73.

⁶⁰ LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁶¹ ARROYO, Liliana; MURILLO, David and VAL, Esther. *Confiados y confiables. La fabricación de la confianza en la era digital*. ESADE Institute for Social Innovation and E&Y Foundation Spain, 2017, p. 6.

⁶² DE SALAS NESTARES and MONSERRAT GAUCHI. *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

⁶³ MARTÍNEZ-ALONSO. *Op. cit.*, p. 101.

⁶⁴ SILVA ROBLES AND ELÍAS ZAMBRANO. *Op. cit.*, pp. 72-96.

ues⁶⁵. By the same token, if reputation is neglected or mismanaged it can trigger crises, to which organisations will have to provide an effective response⁶⁶.

Early identification of potential reputational risks is essential for preventing scandals and crises. If these occur, immediate reaction is the only way to protect this intangible asset; however, the reaction must be anticipated and orderly.

As is the case with every strategy, planning is key. In the *visioning* phase of strategic planning, the organisation should include «its definition of the vision and mission, setting out the principles that will guide the organisation's conduct with the different stakeholders»⁶⁷, paying special attention to talent.

Corporate Communication in any organisation consists of two forms of communication: Communicative Action, or what the organisation says about itself, and Corporate Conduct, the organisation's everyday actions⁶⁸. The two must be consistent and coordinated so that the perceptions of all target audiences build a favourable reputation for the organisation. Corporate reputation, the result of comparing what you say you will do with what you do and the public's opinion in this respect, means that it is essential that the organisation's objectives and values are aligned with its conduct and actions, as well as with the public's experiences and expectations. In short, the organisation needs legitimacy.

The current situation, in the digital environment in particular, is subject to constant scrutiny and demands for transparency. In this context, therefore, the concept of digital reputation is especially important and, moreover, a precondition for the existence of the much-coveted and necessary conversations.

All these concepts will become increasingly important in the future, given that the next ten years will be a period of explosive connectivity and asymmetric upheaval⁶⁹. Thus, in this increasingly hyper-connected world, it is logical to think that the digital medium will virtually monopolise organisations' conversations with their public, precisely because the medium facilitates this.

However, in this emerging environment, it will not be enough for organisations to have a simple presence on the Internet, they will have to become part of it and play the role of active listener in conversations that are «frank, sincere and representative of their values»⁷⁰.

65 DE SALAS NESTARES AND MONSERRAT GAUCHI. *Op. cit.*, p. 55.

66 LÓPEZ JIMÉNEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 9.

67 GARICANO ROJAS. *Op. cit.*, p. 87.

68 CAPRIOTTI, PAUL. *Comunicación Corporativa. Una estrategia de éxito a corto plazo*. 13 August 1999, Reporte C&D - Capacitación y Desarrollo, pp. 30-33.

69 JOHANSEN, Bob. *The New Leadership Literacies. Thriving in a Future of Extreme Disruption and Distributed Everything*. Oakland: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., 2017. Institute for the Future.

70 FERNÁNDEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

In short, it can be concluded that reputation is power and that advances in technology have given it more power than ever before⁷¹, thus making it a matter of critical strategic importance, which military organisations need to take into account.

Military organisations

This broad category encompasses any organisation, national or international, comprised in whole or in part of military personnel engaged in national defence or one of its main axes.

This exceptional mission, which is a public asset, gives these types of organisations special social visibility and resonance. Accordingly, these organisations must 'not only fulfil their core mission, but do so effectively, responsibly and transparently, be exemplary role models in the management of their resources and be consistent in their duties⁷².

It can therefore be concluded that being an exemplary role model is one of the main means of achieving legitimacy for these organisations, with the double requirement that each of the organisation's members be seen as a role model by society in everything they do, inside state borders and in the countries to which they are posted or cooperate with allied armies⁷³.

From the point of view of communication and public relations, military organisations, as public administration and government institutions, cannot afford to come to a standstill for being unable to «constantly speak to the people as individuals and in and through the different groups to which they belong»⁷⁴. All their actions must be correctly perceived by their target audiences, bearing in mind that they attract far more attention from the media and, hence, the public, than any other organisation⁷⁵.

Although every organisation has a corporate culture that influences its members' behaviour, military organisations have a very specific culture which is firmly entrenched in its members; this increases the potential of internal communication⁷⁶ in these organisations, making it a strategic aspect.

71 FERTIK, Michael and THOMPSON, David C. *The Reputation Economy. How to Optimize Your Digital Footprint in a World Where Your Reputation Is Your Most Valuable Asset*. London: Piatkus 2015.

72 CARTELLE VILLAR, Juan Alberto. «La responsabilidad social corporativa en las FAS». *Revista General de Marina*, No. 262. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, January-February 2012, pp. 37-50, p. 43.

73 GARCÍA-GUIU LÓPEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 185.

74 PIMLOTT, J. A. R. *Public Relations and American Democracy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951, p. 64.

75 CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 115.

76 In CASTILLO ESPARCIA, Antonio. *Las relaciones públicas internas como factor de gestión empresarial*. *Anàlisi* 34, 2006, pp. 193-208, internal communication is defined as «the element that allows an organisation's internal audience to participate in the formalisation and decision-making

This characteristic defines and conditions corporate communication in these organisations. Indeed, back in the 1990s, Admiral Kendell Pease⁷⁷ stated that military public relations was similar to public relations in other sectors but with greater emphasis placed on the internal audience in the understanding that the members of these organisations are key elements in corporate communication.

Therefore, a holistic approach should be taken to reputation strategy within the organisation, since it is the responsibility of each and every one of its members, who should know it and internalise it. Thus, «all of the organisation's critical functions and activities must assume this responsibility in their day-to-day management in a cross-cutting manner»⁷⁸.

To achieve appropriate external communication, the internal communication strategy must be a success and begin «inside the organisation and work outwards, moving from command and control to relationships based on commitment, principles and trust, and incorporate development programmes and organisational learning into internal communication strategies»⁷⁹.

Special attention should be afforded to this aspect because certain factors in military organisations can constitute an obstacle to, among other things, establishing the right connection with internal and external audiences.

Vego⁸⁰ speaks of how the «military's inherent hierarchical command structure –and authoritarian and bureaucratized system– and its thinking, which is exemplified by conformity, group-think, parochialism, dogmatism»⁸¹ are the main impediments to military creativity and how this can lead to demotivation. In this vein, he mentions other characteristics typically found in these organisations, such as unquestioning obedience, how the peacetime environment encourages breeding of officers who rigidly follow rules, the policies and systems for military promotions, the authoritarian tendencies of the higher commanders, a fear of failure and making mistakes, the heavily bureaucratized system and some chiefs' tendency to create fiefdoms of power and influence.

These circumstances not only impede the normal flow of creativity among individuals and groups, but also create demotivation and apathy, which directly impact the reputation of the organisation and its communication to internal and external stakeholders.

process through information and engagement. All of this will result in improved understanding, motivation and the achievement of common goals».

77 Former Chief of Information of the United States Department of the Navy.

78 DE SALAS NESTARES and MONSERRAT GAUCHI. *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-59.

79 FERNÁNDEZ. *Op. cit.*, p. 4.

80 Professor of Joint Operations at the Naval War College. U. S. Navy. 2013.

81 VEGO, Milan. «On Military Creativity». *JFQ*, 3rd quarter (70), 2013, pp. 83 – 90, p. 84.

It should be borne in mind that members of an organisation are tuned in to internal and external conduct, and that their perceptions are shaped by both types of conduct. Therefore, what we could call internal reputation is formed by how the members of an organisation perceive the organisation's corporate conduct towards all its targets, not just themselves⁸².

In the future, human capital will undoubtedly be the most critical factor in our defence policy, and talent management will afford an important competitive advantage and emerge as one of the key elements for «identifying, promoting and developing individual talent and turning it into organisational talent»⁸³. Therefore, as mentioned previously in relation to attracting and retaining talent, the organisation's reputation becomes paramount, and if we take into account the age of active servicemen and the generation to which they belong, digital reputation becomes even more important.

As pointed out earlier, digital reputation activities need to be planned and scheduled in the organisation's overall reputation strategy. In addition, the basic requirements of the person responsible for developing it need to be defined, bearing in mind that the current situation calls for a high level of public relations professionalism from those responsible for military public affairs, including high standards of ethics and sound training⁸⁴.

The position of Chief Reputation Officer (CRO) will become necessary for military organisations. This role should be in a position to influence strategy and be able to engage and hold to account all of the organisation's members and coordinate the management of reputation across the entire organisation in accordance with the strategic plan⁸⁵.

Digital reputation and transformation

Transformation can be defined as a special type of change that is holistic, nonlinear, impacts profound aspects of organisations (values, beliefs, etc.) and involves the modification of conceptual, cognitive and operational frameworks within the organisation⁸⁶.

82 VILLAFANA & ASOCIADOS. Twitter. [Published online 2 July 2019]. [Cited on 2 July 2019]. <https://mobile.twitter.com/VillafaneyAsoc/status/1145950484353732608>.

83 RUIZ, Benítez. *Liderazgo y gestión del talento. V edición de las jornadas «El Ejército de Tierra y los retos futuros»*. Revista Española de Defensa, 361. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, May 2019, pp. 42-43.

84 CUTLIP, CENTER and BROOM. *Op. cit.*, p. 663.

85 DE SALAS NESTARES and MONSERRAT GAUCHI. *Op. cit.*, pp. 37-59.

86 CALDERÓN HERNÁNDEZ, G.; CUARTAS CASTAÑO, J. & ÁLVAREZ GIRALDO, C. M. «Transformación organizacional y prácticas innovadoras de gestión humana». *Innovar*, 19 (35). 2009, pp. 151-166.

The current and future situations described earlier force organisations to immerse themselves in the process of adapting to transformation. This transformation cannot be confined merely to structural changes or the digital transformation fad, but calls for profound changes to the corporate culture and philosophy and the definition of an identity, adapted and adaptable, to the organisation itself.

Any organisation seeking to survive cannot pay mere lip service to transformation, showing only superficial and opportunistic elements to its target audiences. On the contrary, the transformation has to be profound, genuine and courageous so that it is perceived as such by internal audiences and so that these assist in conveying the reputation to external targets.

Therefore, a key element is that adaptive changes be based on talent and attitude because real transformation is a human process⁸⁷ which, in the case of military organisations, involves both the members of the organisation and society at large. Indeed society, in whom these organisations must inspire a feeling of safety and which supports them financially, may even demand changes and adaptations as it evolves.

To avoid falling short of expectations, this transformation should be undertaken before it is demanded by the public. Anticipating social needs will, moreover, endow the military organisation with a more enduring reputation based on skills and efficacy.

At the same time, public relations will play a critical role in managing reputation because of its cross-cutting and strategic nature within the organisation. Digital reputation, as an essential and extremely important element in the transformation process, is a perfect tool because of its capacity for overarching action, immediate engagement with audiences and its enormous potential.

Changing individual perceptions of the organisation's image within the organisation calls for a change in individual behaviour which, when combined, will change organisational behaviour and transform the corporate culture.

No less necessary in this process is a change in the behaviour of the most influential members of the organisation who, in short, are responsible for defining the organisation's strategic plan and corporate philosophy, that is to say, its vision and values. Similarly, corporate identity is closely linked to the organisation's purpose, which should also be defined in the strategic plan.

It has been demonstrated that when the transformation is genuine and correctly perceived, it contributes to improving the organisation's reputation and this is a transformative element in itself. It could be said that it sets in motion a sort of virtuous circle where the two concepts feed off each other. A salient feature of this circle is the mutual influence that digital reputation and digital transformation exert on each other, given that the first is an integral part of the second, which gives it real meaning and exponentially improves the first as it develops.

⁸⁷ *Ibíd.*, p. 152.

In summary, military organisations must incorporate into their identity a process of continuous transformation that anticipates society's demands, and digital reputation, as part of the organisation's public relations strategy, is a contributing strategic element that should be harnessed.

Results and conclusions

The practice of managing communication, which is based on relationships between organisations and their target audiences, is what is known as public relations. Its primary goal is to improve these audiences' perceptions of the organisation by understanding them and interpreting information and ideas.

Organisations must have credibility in the dialogue they engage in with their audiences and earn their trust, as this is fundamental for any interaction. Trust must be earned over time and cannot be improvised. Therefore, it is essential to have credibility and legitimacy, in other words, that audiences feel they can safely believe the organisation's message and see its actions as desirable and in line with their expectations.

It is generally agreed that reputation plays a direct role in the trust-building process. This concept, i.e. the public's perception of an organisation based on its actions and conduct throughout time, is closely linked to the concept of image, which, while also a perception, is more short-term; hence, if a good image is maintained over time, it creates a good reputation.

In the digital environment, which is much more demanding in terms of speed and accuracy, managing reputation is extremely important due to the far-reaching impact of this medium, the absence of control over content and the ease and speed with which information can be traced.

Digital reputation has become a key strategic issue in the public relations of any organisation, primarily for the following reasons:

1. It is essential in conversations with the public.
2. It has a strong impact because of the permeability of the digital medium.
3. It impacts both online and offline media.
4. It affects all of the organisation's target audiences, both internal and external.

Affording digital reputation the importance it deserves in the public relations strategy of an organisation has the following advantages:

1. In the immediate future, most conversations that organisations engage in with their public will take place in the digital environment, and a positive reputation gives the organisation the credibility it needs to ensure that the conversations do not damage the organisation.
2. Digital reputation gives conversations an immediacy and speed not found in offline reputation.

3. A good digital reputation, forged through transparency, legitimacy and ethics, makes it easier for the general public to accept the organisation and its messages.
4. Digital reputation helps to avoid negative judgments about the organisation which, in the digital environment, carry the risk of becoming permanent.
5. A good digital reputation helps the organisation to attract and retain talent.
6. In general, online reputation generates supportive behaviour both online and offline.
7. In addition, it fosters a spirit of cooperation and expands the values of the organisation.

A good reputation can be built by:

1. Working on each stakeholder's perception of the organisation's corporate image.
2. Giving the organisation a genuine and appropriate purpose, having good management and being efficient.
3. Communicating values and ethics.
4. Pursuing long-term strategies and avoiding improvisation.
5. Conveying consistency, transparency and legitimacy.
6. Providing quick and timely responses.

Although they function like any other organisation, military organisations nevertheless have specific characteristics which, from a public relations perspective, make them especially sensitive to public opinion. These characteristics are as follows:

1. They provide their services to the entire population; therefore, the whole of society is a target audience.
2. Their activities have a major social impact.
3. Society expects a higher level of ethics, exemplary conduct and accountability from them.
4. These organisations have a strong corporate culture and their internal audiences require special attention.

For all these reasons, defining a public relations strategy focused on digital reputation becomes more important than ever for these types of organisations, one which enables the organisation to build high levels of trust among its audiences and resolve any crises they may be confronted with on account of their high social exposure in an appropriate manner. In addition, it plays a key role in attracting and retaining talent, a critical factor in defence policy.

Implementation of this strategy in military organisations should be managed and coordinated by a Chief Reputation Officer (CRO) with the appropriate organic strategic level and preparation, an aspect that could be the subject of future studies.

Digital reputation strategy has a transformative effect on the members of an organisation, particularly in relation to corporate culture. If this is strengthened and internalised by military organisations, the transformation it brings about is real and profound. At the same time, this transformation feeds the organisation's reputation,

from which its members benefit and are proud of, and creates a mutually nourishing effect between reputation and transformation, which are continually being built, thus having enormous benefits for the organisation.

It can therefore be concluded that digital reputation strategy is necessary in military organisations and is capable of transforming them and adapting them to the requirements of their target audiences.

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