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Corporate blogging in Spanish companies. Design and application of a quality index (ICB)

Los blogs corporativos en las empresas españolas. Diseño y aplicación de un índice de calidad (ICB)

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ABSTRACT: Blogs have strengthened its position as an online communication tool to increase the dialogue between organizations and their publics, and this thanks to their interactive capacity and easy use. Although blogs didn't enjoy the popularity and swift penetration of social networks, Spanish companies are gradually incorporating this channel to their Public Relations plans. Thus, it becomes increasingly interesting to develop a quantitative index allowing determining the degree of compliance to excellence criteria. This paper aims to identify the main factors in order to value the quality of a corporate blog, describes the design of the evaluation index and, later, applies this index to study the corporate blogs of the main Spanish companies in order to unveil how they are exploiting its many advantages.

Key words: Corporate blogging, public relations, quality index, interactivity, evaluation.

RESUMEN: Los blogs se han consolidado como una herramienta de comunicación online que favorece el diálogo de las organizaciones con sus públicos gracias a su capacidad interactiva y a su facilidad de uso. Aunque no han gozado de la popularidad y rápida penetración de las redes sociales, las empresas españolas siguen incorporando este canal de forma paulatina a sus planes de relaciones públicas por lo que parece interesante desarrollar un índice de evaluación cuantitativa que permita determinar el grado de cumplimiento de unos criterios mínimos de excelencia. El presente artículo identifica los factores primordiales para valorar la calidad de un blog corporativo, describe el diseño del índice de evaluación (ICB) y, por último, lo aplica a las bitácoras de las principales empresas españolas para conocer en qué medida están explotando sus numerosas ventajas.

Palabras clave: blog corporativo, relaciones públicas, índice de calidad, interactividad, evaluación.

1. Introduction

Corporate blogs have contributed to transforming the paradigm of communication within companies and have become a key factor in planning social media strategy¹. Among the wide array of collaborative tools that have emerged with the Web 2.0., organizations appreciate blogs' ease of use, their low cost, visibility, authority and influence, their ability to provide a more human voice, their improvement of search engine positioning, their immediacy for managing communication crises, their effectiveness when transferring the corporate culture to the Internet and above all, their usefulness for engaging in a dialogue with the public and legitimizing the company's discourse using a language that is personal and transparent².

In Spain, various studies have shown that blogs remain an important pillar in companies' online communication strategy, and even highlight faster growth than expected after the emergence of social networks³. According to the Banesto Foundation, 27% of Spanish companies use this channel to communicate with their markets, 36% of blog readers trust companies that publish their own blogs and 60% regard them as a reliable source of information. In addition, 74% of respondents acknowledge having read a blog that has generated a positive opinion of a specific brand and 50% even recalled a post that

¹ Cfr. Wright, Donald K. & HINSON, Michelle, "How Blogs and Social Media are Changing Public Relations and the Way it is Practiced", *Public Relations Journal*, vol. 2, 2, 2008, pp. 1-21.

² Cfr. MONGE, Sergio, "Community Manager. Cuando los blogs no son suficiente", paper presented at *II Congreso de Cyberperiodismo y Web 2.0*, 2010, available at <http://www.sergiomonge.com/doc/community-manager.pdf>; NOGUERA, José Manuel, "Redes sociales como paradigma periodístico. Medios españoles en Facebook", *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, 65, 2010, pp. 176-186; PINO, Ivan, *14 razones para publicar un blog corporativo*, January 2008, available at <http://ivanpino.com/14-razones-para-publicar-un-blog-corporativo>; SCOBLE, Robert & ISRAEL, Shel, *Naked conversations. How blogs are changing the way businesses talk with customers*, John Wiley & Sons, New Jersey, 2006; SELTZER, Trent & MITROOK, Michael A., "The dialogic potential of weblogs in relationship building", *Public Relations Review*, 33, 2007, pp. 227-229; SINGH, Tanuja, VERON-JACKSON Liza et al., "Blogging: A new play in your marketing game plan", *Business Horizons*, 51, 2008, pp. 281-292; SWEETSER, Kaye D. & METZGAR, Emily, "Communicating during crisis: Use of blogs as a relationship management tool", *Public Relations Review*, 33, 3, 2007, pp. 340-342.

³ ESTUDIO COMUNICACIÓN, *Las compañías del Ibx 35 y el uso de la Web 2.0*, September 2010, available at <http://www.estudiodecomunicacion.com>; FUNDACIÓN BANESTO, *Tendencias y usos de las redes sociales en la PYME españolas*, 2011, available at <http://emprededoresenred.org/>; FUNDACIÓN ORANGE Y TIGE, *Estudio del uso del software social en la empresa española 2011*, 2011, available at http://www.informeeespana.es/docs/software-social_empresas2011.pdf.

caused a negative opinion. Meanwhile, the agency Estudio de Comunicación⁴ estimates that 30% of Spanish companies maintain a corporate blog. This figure rises to 75% for financial institutions listed on the IBEX 35, while a study by the Orange Foundation⁵) says that this 2.0. application is preferred by companies in the Information Technology (IT) sector for optimizing internal communication and change management.

Although many researchers have analyzed corporate blogs, their potential for dialogue and their usefulness in various areas of public relations⁶, most of the studies undertaken to date have not provided empirical evidence confirming the power of blogs to listen to the public or to move towards the universally accepted bidirectional model⁷ and some have even observed a significant underutilization of interactive resources⁸. Given the need for further analysis of this tool and to contribute to optimizing its quality, some authors have proposed a number of factors that must be taken into account when determining excellent practice by organizations.

⁴ ESTUDIO COMUNICACIÓN, *op. cit.* ESTUDIO COMUNICACIÓN, *Presencia de las entidades financieras españolas en las redes sociales*, may 2010, available at <http://www.estudiodecomunicacion.com>.

⁵ Cfr. FUNDACIÓN ORANGE Y TIGE, *op. cit.*

⁶ Cfr. DEARSTYNE, Bruce W., "Blogs: The new information revolution?", *Information Management Journal*, 39, 5, 2005, pp. 38-44; FIESELER, Christian, FLECK, Matthes et al., "Corporate social responsibility in the blogosphere", *Journal of Business Ethics*, 91, 4, 2010, pp. 599-614; SECKO, David, "The power of the blog", *The Scientist*, 19, 15, 2005, pp. 37-39; SELTZER, Trent & MITROOK, Michael A., *op. cit.*; SWEETSER, Kaye D., PORTER, Lance V. et al., "Credibility and the use of blogs among professional in the communication industry", *Journalism and Mass Communication Quarterly*, 85, 1, 2008, pp. 169-185; Wright & Hinson, *op. cit.*

⁷ Cfr. KENT, Michael, "Critical analysis of blogging in public relations" *Public Relations Review*, vol. 34, 1, 2008, pp. 32-40; TAYLOR, Maureen & KENT, Michael L., "Anticipatory socialization in the use of social media in public relations: A content analysis of PRSA's Public Relations Tactics", *Public Relations Review*, 36, 3, 2010, pp. 207-214.

⁸ Cfr. HUERTAS, Asunción & XIFRA, Jordi, "Blogging PR: Análisis de contenido de los blogs de relaciones públicas", *Actas del III Congreso Internacional de Investigación en Relaciones Públicas*, AIRP, 2007; JIMÉNEZ, Sonia & SALVADOR, Javier, "Evaluación formal de blogs con contenidos académicos y de investigación en el área de documentación", *El Profesional de la Información*, vol. 16, 2, 2007, pp. 114-122; NOGUERA, José Manuel, *Blogs y Medios. Las claves de una relación de interés mutuo*, Libros en red, Madrid, 2008; VILLANUEVA, Julián, ACED, Cristina et al., *Blogs corporativos: una opción, no una obligación*, E-Business Center PriceWaterCooper & IESE Business School, Madrid, 2007, available at <http://www.ebcenter.org>.

1.1. Authorship and language

The experts believe that the blog must be written by various authors who are “identified and identifiable”⁹ who provide an intimate view of the company, instead of simply presenting it as a corporate entity. Another positive factor is managers’ involvement in writing the content, as well as workers at all levels of the organization¹⁰. Several studies have shown that users want the ‘human voice’ of the company, and impersonal blogs do not have support from bloggers¹¹, as they are perceived as marketing tools or as simple filters for the public relations department.

According to most authors¹², using a natural language that is personal, intimate and accessible is one of the key factors in the success of corporate blogs, as it encourages readers to read them more often. In fact, readers confer special value on the information they receive from someone they trust and that is why behind every blog article there should be a voice that is recognized as being different from conventional corporate communication. In order to foster credibility, posts should be signed so that readers have some idea of the author’s motivations and contact him or her if they wish.

Furthermore, users should be aware of the purpose of the blog, so an explanation of its subject, purpose and content should be published in a visible place, in addition to the organization’s basic contact information. The use of a corporate URL so that the blog reader can identify the blog with the com-

⁹ CORTÉS, Marc, “Blogs... ¿Pero no habían muerto?”, en SANAGUSTÍN, Eva (dir. & ed.), *Claves del nuevo marketing*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2009, p. 114; HEWITT, Hugh, *Blog: Understanding the information reformation that’s changing your world*, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, Tenn, 2005.

¹⁰ Cfr. EZQUER, Fermín & CASTELLANO, José Manuel, *B2S Big to Small. Las estrategias de las grandes corporaciones al alcance de la mediana empresa*, Netbiblo, La Coruña, 2010.

¹¹ Cfr. LEE, Sang, HWANG, Taewon & LEE, Hong-Hee, “Corporate blogging strategies of the Fortune 500 companies”, *Management Decision*, vol. 44, 3, 2006, pp. 316-334.

¹² Cfr. ARIZPE, Gustavo, “Para escépticos: El weblog como herramienta de marketing de respuestas directa”, in MARTÍNEZ, Samuel & SOLANO, Edwing (coords.), *Blogs, Bloggers, Blogósfera: una revisión multidisciplinaria*, UIA, México, 2010, pp. 234-239; BOAG, Paul, *10 harsh truth about corporate blogging*, August/9/2009, available at <http://www.smashingmagazine.com/2009/08/09/10-harsh-truths-about-corporate-blogging/>; COOK, Trevor, “Can Blogginn Unspin PR?”, in Bruns, Axel & Jacobs, Joanne (ed.), *Uses of Blogs*, Peter Lang, New York, 2006, pp. 45-56; MONGE, Sergio, *op. cit.*; ORTIZ DE ZÁRATE, Alberto, *Manual de uso del blog en la empresa. Cómo prosperar en la sociedad de la conversación*, Infonomía, Barcelona, 2008; ROJAS, Octavio (coord.), *Web 2.0. Manual (no oficial) de uso*, ESIC, Madrid, 2007.

pany to which it belongs is also positive, and free registration portals should be avoided as far as possible¹³.

1.2. Content and updating

As regards content, the inclusion of photographs, videos and podcasts that reinforce and enhance the written message is always useful for blogs¹⁴. Underpinning this idea, Celaya says that multimedia is the essence of the social web, and therefore recommends the use of videos, images and audio files, instead of a model that is indebted to the printed medium, in which text predominates¹⁵. Blackshaw¹⁶, meanwhile, believes that videos are very effective at managing, containing or even reversing a crisis or the spread of rumours. In his opinion “online video in a corporate blog can be used to great effect in managing, containing, or even reversing a crisis or the spread of rumors. If properly and credibly executed, video can drive or reinforce deeper emotional connections as well as convey greater authenticity and sincerity when times are tough”¹⁷.

Del Río¹⁸ makes a number of recommendations for creating a successful post, including identifying the subject and appropriate tags, being the first to publish specific content to obtain the most links, acting as a connector between weakly distributed networks, encouraging comments, using original and innovative content, and establishing a marketing of words and headlines. It is also a good idea to make sure that the blog can be viewed properly, at least in the major browsers. This author is also in favour of using sources of information from outside the organization and citing them, because this helps to recognize and present content that is relevant for the readership.

Moreover, updating is one of the major defining characteristics of the type of communication that takes place on the Internet, and is related with the

¹³ Cfr. ROS-MARTÍN, Marcos, “Metodología para la implementación de un blog corporativo externo”, *El profesional de la información*, vol. 17, september-october 2008, 5, pp. 502-510.

¹⁴ Cfr. DE JONG, René, *Sácale partido a Internet: técnicas para incrementar visitas, ventas y ganancias*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2010; ROJAS, Octavio, ALONSO, Jaime et al., *Blogs. La conversación en Internet que está revolucionando medios, empresas y ciudadanos*, ESIC, Madrid, 2006.

¹⁵ Cfr. CELAYA, Javier, *La empresa en la Web 2.0: El impacto de las redes sociales y las nuevas formas de comunicación online en la estrategia empresarial*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2008.

¹⁶ Cfr. BLACKSHAW, Pete, *No hay donde esconderse*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2009.

¹⁷ Cfr. BLACKSHAW, Pete, *Satisfied customers tell three friends, angry customers tell 3,000: running a business in today's consumer-driven world*, Doubleday, New York, 2000.

¹⁸ Cfr. DEL RÍO, Jorge, *Postesfera. Ecosistema del blog*, Editorial BuBok, 2009, available at <http://www.bubok.es/libros/19600/POSTESFERA>

concept of ‘flexibility’ that characterizes the network¹⁹. Although the timing of the contents depends on the characteristics and objectives of each blog, the fact is that regular updates are more important than a high frequency of ‘posting’. Some authors, however, are in favour of including new posts as often as possible²⁰ because this improves search engine rankings. As Celaya and Herrera point out, each post and each comment generates a new web page with keywords related to the company, which directly increases its presence and visibility on the Internet²¹.

Alonso highlights the proportional relationship between the timing of the content and the valuation –positive or negative– of users as regards the site. In his opinion, a good treatment of updating is a positive factor for users, as they believe that taking care of this aspect means that there is a greater likelihood of other elements also being properly addressed:

It could be said that contents that are treated well from the perspective of time lead to an increase in user confidence. On the other hand, presenting a website with outdated content leads to a lack of confidence among users, as they may extrapolate this bad practice to other content and activities on the site²².

However, updating corporate blogs requires a high degree of professionalism. People need to be engaged in this task both efficiently and above all continuously. For this reason, before they enter the blogosphere, companies must be clear about the dedication required and whether they are willing to accept it.

1.3. Usability

As for the usability of the blog, Alonso recalls the importance of the reader always knowing what section he or she is reading²³. A poor design can

¹⁹ Cfr. ALONSO, Jaime, “Comunicar en el Web: Propuesta de criterios para analizar sitios en Internet”, *Teknocultura, revista Online*, vol. 7, 2007, p. 1-14, available at <http://teknokultura.uprrp.edu/pdf/alonso.pdf>

²⁰ Cfr. BRUGUERA, Enric, *Los blogs*, UOC, Barcelona, 200; DE JONG, René, *op. cit.*

²¹ Cfr. CELAYA, Javier & HERRERA, Pablo, *Comunicación empresarial 2.0. La función de las nuevas tecnologías sociales en la estrategia de comunicación empresarial*, BPMO, Madrid, 2007.

²² ALONSO, Jaime, *op. cit.*, 2010a, p. 8.

²³ ALONSO, Jaime, *op. cit.*, 2010b.

hinder the location of information, leading to a potential loss of repeat visits due to users' initial negative experience²⁴. Blogs should therefore be divided into sections, in which each page provides the necessary links to the main content, the index or menu should always be displayed on the screen, and a swift return to the home page should always be possible.

Various studies of websites show that usability is a key aspect in creating a good brand image. This characteristic, which is also linked to the blog's effectiveness, refers to the ease with which a user can learn to operate the system effectively and flexibly, understand its structure, memorize its basic functions and generally, how they assess their own ability to manage it²⁵. Ultimately, the aim is to meet the readership's needs by the appropriate layout of components in the screen environment²⁶.

In this regard, websites or blogs, that are perceived to be or are easier to open, browse, or use, create a more positive attitude and image among users²⁷. Spool²⁸ showed that Internet users who browse more smoothly and find the information they want quickly are given a positive impression of the brand, because it meets their expectations to a greater extent. By contrast, the obstacles that users find while browsing affect their brand perception directly and negatively. This concept is essential for effective branding.

Likewise, visitors to the blog should also be able to locate posts easily, with files organised by category or based on the posting date. An internal search engine is another very useful feature and it should be placed in a prominent position.

Tagging items is also an intelligent means of classification, which fosters access to content and enables conceptual browsing. According to Del Río²⁹,

²⁴ Cfr. MIRANDA, Francisco Javier, BARRIUSO, Cristina et al., "La banca por Internet en España: Aplicación del Índice de Evaluación Web", *Boletín Económico ICE*, 2855, September 2005, pp. 15-30.

²⁵ Cfr. NIELSEN, Jakob, *Usability engineering*, Morgan Kaufman, San Francisco, 1994.

²⁶ Cfr. MICÓ, Josep Lluís & MASIP, Pere, "Recursos multimedia en los cibermedios españoles", *Tripodos*, 23, 2008, pp. 89-105, available at <http://www.raco.cat/index.php/Tripodos/article/view/118914/154118>

²⁷ Cfr. CHEN, Qimei & WELLS, William, "Attitude toward the site", *Journal of Advertising Research*, 36, 5, 1999, pp. 27-37; CHEN, Lei-Da, GILLENSON, Mark L. et al., "Enticing online consumers: an extended technology acceptance perspective", *Information and Management*, 39, 8, 2002, pp. 705-719; HEIJDEN, Hans, "Factors influencing the usage of web sites: the case of a generic portal in The Netherlands", *Information and Management*, 40, 6, 2003, pp. 541-549.

²⁸ SPOOL, Jared M., "Branding and Usability", *User Interface Engineering*, vol. 1, 1996, available at http://www.uie.com/articles/branding_usability

²⁹ Del Río, Jorge, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

by doing this we provide “a set of coordinates that help others to position it thematically”. Articles are searchable by topic and popularity in the tag clouds. Lists of posts, recent comments and most read articles also contribute to readers being able to browse the blog easily and find what they want.

Creative Commons licenses fit the philosophy of blogging best, because although the digital creator can reserve the rights they wish, these licenses allow third parties to use and/or modify their work under certain conditions established by the author beforehand³⁰. There are a number of creative commons licenses, each with different configurations or principles, such as the original author’s right to give freedom to quote his/her work, reproduce it, create derivative works, disseminate it publicly, and they have various restrictions, such as not allowing commercial use, or respecting the original authorship.

1.4. Interactivity

Another important aspect for the development of blogs is interactivity, i.e. the ability of users to be active. Interactive features are positive only if they have a definite meaning, if they are part of a specific strategy by the company and if users use them. In corporate blogs, the brand speaks to the client, the client can talk/interact with the brand, while talking/interacting with other clients. As a result, “basing business decisions based on customer feedback and market intelligence is the smartest business move you could ever make”³¹.

Interactivity is therefore another of the Internet’s distinguishing features³² which enables increased processing of information and generates more positive attitudes toward the product and brand, as well as increased purchase inten-

³⁰ Cfr. NAFRÍA, Ismael, *Web 2.0. El usuario, el nuevo rey de Internet*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2007.

³¹ WRIGHT, Jeremy, *Blog marketing: The revolutionary new way to increase sales, build your band, and get exceptional results*, McGraw-Hill, New York, 2006, p. 4.

³² Cfr. DOWNES, Edward & McMILLAN, Sally, “Defining interactivity. A qualitative identification of key dimensions”, *New Media & Society*, 2, 2, 2000, pp. 157-179; HA, Louise & JAMES, E. Lincoln, “Interactivity reexamined. A baseline analysis of early business web sites”, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 42, 4, 1998, pp. 457-474; RAFAELI, Sheizaf, “Interactivity: from media to communication”, en HAWKINS, Robert, WIEMANN, John et al. (eds.), *Annual Reviews of Communication Research*, 16, 1988, pp. 110-134; SCHULTZ, Tanjev, “Mass media and the concept of interactivity: An exploratory study of online forums and reader email”, *Media Culture & Society*, 22, 2000, pp. 205-221.

tions³³. The most significant parameters in posting activity are its ability to transform visits into incoming links and to generate comments³⁴.

There are a number of useful practices that enhance the interactivity of blogs, such as content syndication, which turns any blog into a potential supplier of news. The various RSS formats enable subscribers to automatically receive new articles that are published on it. This encourages reading by users who are potentially interested in the content of the information³⁵, making it advisable to provide the opportunity to subscribe to the blog, via both RSS and e-mail.

Meanwhile, the ping is the mechanism through which a blog announces that it has new content to web servers or services, while the trackback function shows what links in other blogs refer to the company's blog. As Celaya³⁶ recalls, using hypertext and links is essential, as is enabling a comments system. A restrictive use of links in a blog is clearly inconsistent with being a social medium, and hinders relationships on the Internet³⁷.

The ability to comment is an essential part of the social media and their ecosystem, where conversation and dialogue flow in all directions simultaneously³⁸. Although a study by Herring, Kouper, Paolillo and Scheidt³⁹ states that in fact the blogosphere is partially connected and conversation takes place at a lower level of intensity than is assumed, the fact is that capacity for dialogue is a key characteristic of blogs.

This forces organizations to use this channel to control and manage information, or to respond to criticism and praise quickly and effectively⁴⁰. In addition, the comments received are used by the organization to obtain external information that may be very interesting for the development of

³³ Cfr. KO, Hanjun, CHANG-HOAN Cho et al., "Internet Uses and Gratifications A Structural Equation Model of Interactive Advertising", *Journal of Advertising*, vol. 34, 2, 2005, pp. 57-70; SICILIA, María, RUIZ, Salvador et al., "Effects of interactivity in a website. The moderating effect of need for cognition", *Journal of Advertising*, 34, 2005, pp. 31-45.

³⁴ Cfr. Del Río, Jorge, *op. cit.*

³⁵ Cfr. BRUGUERA, Enric, *op. cit.*; CELAYA, Javier, *op. cit.*; VILLANUEVA, Julián, *op. cit.*

³⁶ Cfr. Celaya, Javier, *op. cit.*

³⁷ Cfr. Bruguera, Enric, *op. cit.*

³⁸ Cfr. PANO, Ana, "Diálogo y lengua española en contextos de comunicación mediada por ordenador", *Quaderni del CeSLiC*, Occasional papers, Centro di Studi Linguistico-Culturali (CeSLiC), Bologna, 2009, pp. 4-24.

³⁹ Cfr. HERRING, Susan C., KOUPEL, Inna, et al., "Conversations in the blogosphere: An analysis from the bottom up", *Proceedings of the 38th Hawaii International Conference on System Sciences*, IEEE Press, Los Alamitos, 2005.

⁴⁰ Cfr. SINGH, Tanuja, VERON-JACKSON, Liza et al., *op. cit.*

new products and/or services, as well as reinforcing and improving those that already exist⁴¹. Comments require a much higher level of user involvement than simply reading⁴² and as Larranaga and Tato⁴³ have pointed out, they have a major influence on the purchase of products and services by consumers.

It seems that a blog should not only provide the opportunity for comments from readers, but should also have a ‘conversational’ format, i.e. these comments should generate some kind of reaction from the other side. These reactions, from the author or authors, may appear as comments which answer other comments, or as updates or corrections to the original post, usually with an indication that this has occurred. The discussion sometimes moves to other sites that comment on the original post, and some authors follow their trackbacks in reverse to comment on entries in other blogs. What ultimately matters is the “conversational format”⁴⁴.

In this respect, Monge states that deleting negative comments from a blog is a bad practice that ends up affecting the credibility of the company by creating rejection in the blogosphere. In his opinion, “one option is to use a blog without any comments, but you are missing out on a very important advantage of the blog as a communication tool - the ability to receive feedback, set up debates on subjects of interest...”⁴⁵ and thereby solve problems that the company had not identified itself.

Wright also believes that “Customers are your best product managers, your best evangelists, and perhaps the only people in the world who will tell you the truth about your company. Listen to them”⁴⁶. This author offers several pieces of advice on how to deal with negative comments. First, he recommends showing respect, as behind an angry criticism is often a consumer who feels badly treated. Second, he suggests providing a rapid response, and finally, an effective solution which involves acknowledging the problem, responding to the complaint and following it up.

⁴¹ Cfr. Villanueva et al., *op. cit.*

⁴² DANS, Enrique, *Todo va a cambiar. Tecnología y evolución: adaptarse o desaparecer*, Ediciones Deusto, Barcelona, 2010.

⁴³ Cfr. LARRAÑAGA, Julio & TATO, Irene, “Aspectos comunicativos y análisis socioeconómicos de los blogs corporativos en las estrategias de comunicación. Aplicación a la industria farmacéutica”, *FISEC-Estrategias*, 8, pp. 43-76.

⁴⁴ DANS, Enrique, “Blogs y empresa. Una aproximación a la vanguardia de la blogosfera corporativa”, *Telos*, 65, October-December 2005, p. 81.

⁴⁵ MONGE, Sergio, *Razones para lanzar un blog corporativo*, 2007, available at <http://www.sergiomonge.com/servicios/lanzamiento-blog-corporativo/razones>

⁴⁶ WRIGHT, Jeremy, *op. cit.*, p. 17.

Monge⁴⁷ is also in favour of attempting to solve the problem mentioned by the user when the criticism is justified. Furthermore, he considers it worthwhile to provide a contact e-mail address which any reader can use to notify the author directly of any incident⁴⁸.

However, most experts⁴⁹ are in favour of implementing moderation systems to accept constructive criticism and block comments that are simply offensive. “Moderation is useful for preventing spam or comments that are disrespectful or even insulting”⁵⁰. It is important priority that they are moderated by professionals, and that the conversations are related to the objectives or purposes that have been established by those responsible for the blog⁵¹. Moreover, the number of comments received by the content of a blog can be interpreted as an indicator of the interest it arouses⁵². However, one of the most surprising results of the study by Villanueva et al. was that the most visited blogs were those that did not moderate the comments, those without a high monthly average of comments and those that did not allow automatic publication of opinions. This finding led them to state that “the most successful blogs operate more like a traditional website, which users use to find information, rather than as a tool for interaction between individuals”⁵³.

1.5. Virality

Virality –the rapid transmission of messages via networks– has become an increasingly valuable asset for corporate blogs. The ‘fault’ lies with social networks, the new platforms on which online marketing is based, and whose two key concepts are relationships and relevance. Cuesta and Alonso maintain that the relationships created around social networks “are the best marketing campaign that a brand could want”⁵⁴.

⁴⁷ Cfr. MONGE, Sergio, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ Cfr. BRUGUERA, Enric, *op. cit.*

⁴⁹ Cfr. CELAYA, Javier, *op. cit.*; ORIHUELA, José Luis, “Weblogs y Blogosfera: El medio y la comunidad”, en ROJAS, Octavio et al., *La revolución de los blogs. Cuando las bitácoras se convirtieron en el medio de comunicación de la gente*, La esfera de los libros, Madrid, 2006; SANAGUSTÍN, Eva, *Blogs y empresas. Tu marca en la blogosfera*, UOC, Barcelona, 2010.

⁵⁰ VILLANUEVA, Julián, ACED, Cristina, et al., *op. cit.*, p. 32.

⁵¹ Cfr. ALONSO, Jaime, *op. cit.*

⁵² Cfr. Monge, Sergio, *op. cit.*

⁵³ VILLANUEVA, Julián, ACED, Cristina et al., *op. cit.* p. 28.

⁵⁴ Cfr. CUESTA, Félix & ALONSO, Manuel A., *Marketing directo 2.0. Cómo vender más en un entorno digital*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2010.

The networks' capacity as potential spaces for aggregating and managing external content is unrivalled⁵⁵. The endless amount of information that is published on blogs every day has created the need for management tools, such as mashups, which enable various content to be grouped together that were not in principle designed for that purpose, and interaction between them is thereby achieved⁵⁶. According to Harfoursh, in the Obama campaign for the Presidency of the United States in 2008, "the blog was used to circulate content created by the other new media departments. Videos from Obama's official YouTube channel and pictures from the Obama Flickr site were reposted on the blog. This provided another platform for the content and exposed supporters to the other social networks where the campaign had a presence"⁵⁷.

Moreover, the integration of plugins by Facebook or Twitter, together with the other social networking sites, greatly enhances the dissemination of the blog's information. It is therefore wise to generate virality by ensuring that all the company's profiles on social platforms are included in the blog, and by installing the necessary applications for users to be able to share information with their contacts from their own profiles. Ease of transfer is important and in this respect, it should be possible to send the information by means of a single click. People feel reaffirmed when they see that others have made the same choice as they have, so product grades, 'like' buttons, indicators of how many people have downloaded content, etc. are useful.

As regards the close and mutually beneficial relationship between Twitter and corporate blogs, Álvarez has shown in recent research that companies siphon Internet users from one application to another using links and constant feedback between the contents of the two channels: "Companies often post news and updates on Twitter that they have already posted on their corporate blog"⁵⁸.

Social networks are designed so that information moves quickly from member to member, each according to their own characteristics. LinkedIn is a major source of B2B exchanges and the platform contains all types of groups listed by interest, profession, company affiliation, place of study, etc. Facebook is a powerful tool for building relationships, increasing brand visibility

⁵⁵ Cfr. Monge, Sergio, *op. cit.*

⁵⁶ Cfr. CHARTE, Francisco, *Los mejores trucos para Internet*, Anaya Multimedia, Madrid, 2008.

⁵⁷ HARFOUSH, Rahaf, *Yes we did: cómo construimos la marca Obama a través de las redes sociales*, Gestión 2000, Barcelona, 2010.

⁵⁸ Cfr. ÁLVAREZ, María Luz, "Blogging y microblogging corporativo. Comunicación 2.0 de los operadores de internet fija en España", *Actas del VII Congreso Internacional de Investigación en Relaciones Públicas*, Sevilla, 21-23th March 2012, pp. 48-49.

and targeting specific market niches, while Twitter is an excellent channel for networking with colleagues, clients and disseminating an idea, asking for opinions, sharing links, promoting products and services to a defined audience, publicizing the content of blogs, etc.

The first rule for successfully expanding content is to know where the customers are. The second is to provide value, solve problems and foster entertainment. This will arouse people's interest, and they will be willing to share what the company comments. According to Curtichs et al., the messages must be innovative, easy to remember, should generate debate, offer incentives to users, and be useful⁵⁹.

Finally, a feature like the blogroll also encourages connectivity, as it is a form of recognition that helps others do the same and consequently enhances traffic and search engine rankings. Links to other blogs or websites help to make the blog a benchmark as a source of information on a topic or for a specific community⁶⁰. Hyperlinks in posts are another interesting resource that provide links to information beyond the blog and which lend credibility to the internal information and data⁶¹.

2. Methodology

2.1. Design of the Blog Quality Index (BQI)

In order to evaluate the excellence of the Spanish corporate blogs, we first designed a template for content analysis using the research by Alonso, Huertas and Xifra, Salvador Jiménez and Ornelas and López for reference⁶². Contributions from studies of corporate blogs by Herring, Scheldt, Bonus and Wright and Lee, Hwang and Lee were also included⁶³, as well as Orihuela's

⁵⁹ Cfr. CURTICHS, Javier, FUENTES, Mauro A., et al., *Sentido social: la comunicación y el sentido común en la era de la Internet Social*, Profit, Barcelona, 2011.

⁶⁰ BURGOS, Enrique & CORTÉS Marc, *Intíciate en el marketing 2.0. Los social media como herramientas de fidelización de clientes*, Netbiblo, La Coruña, 2009, p. 52.

⁶¹ Cfr. BRUGUERA, Enric, *op. cit.*

⁶² Cfr. ALONSO, Jaime, *op. cit.*; HUERTAS, Asunción & XIFRA, Jordi, *op. cit.*; JIMÉNEZ, Sonia & SALVADOR, Javier, *op. cit.*; ORNELAS LEY, Anahi & LÓPEZ-ORNELAS, Maricela, "En búsqueda de la calidad de la información que se publica en Internet", *Textos de la CiberSociedad*, 12, 2009, available at <http://www.cibersociedad.net>

⁶³ Cfr. HERRING, Susan C., KOUPER, Inna, et al., *op. cit.*; LEE, Sang, HWANG, Taewon & LEE, Hong-Hee, *op. cit.*

adaptation of the test by Alexander and Tate⁶⁴ designed for analyzing web content, the guidelines proposed by Jakob Nielsen and Marie Tahir⁶⁵ and the guide for the design and evaluation of digital communication projects by Orihuela and Santos⁶⁶. In total, a list of 85 items grouped into five categories was created: authorship; content and updating; usability; interactivity and virality.

a. Authorship: corporate blogs were classified according to whether they are written by an employee, a group of workers, an executive, use a mixed formula, or if they lack a recognizable voice and are therefore impersonal. In addition, we analyzed the author's relationship to the company, whether details of the person responsible for the channel are included, and the inclusion of contact details, the organization's logo, and explanation of its purposes and the use of corporate colours, including other aspects.

b. Content and updating: the analysis considered covered the topics covered in the posts, the use of images, video and audio, the refresh rate, the inclusion of the company's own advertising or that of other companies, whether sources of information are cited, versions in other languages provided, and the date of publication of each article indicated.

c. Usability: the blog's usability takes into account factors such as lists of earlier files sorted by category or by date, the use of internal search engines, a list of most recent posts, a calendar, information structured into sections, a tag cloud, etc.

d. Interactivity: this measures users' opportunity to participate using tools such as surveys, RSS and e-mail subscription, comments, audio, video or application downloads, sales of products and services, the company's response to users (second feedback, etc.).

e. Virality: this measures the degree of the blog's relationships with other websites, related blogs and social networks.

Later, following criteria and recommendations from researchers and experts in the field⁶⁷ we identified the primary factors considered determinants of the

⁶⁴ Cfr. ORIHUELA, José Luis, "Evaluación de contenidos de sitios web. Adaptación del Test de Alexander & Tate", 2001, available at <http://valle.eresmas.net/informe.doc>

⁶⁵ Cfr. NIELSEN, Jakob & TAHIR, Marie, *Usabilidad de páginas de inicio: Análisis de 50 sitios web*, Pearson Educación, Madrid, 2002.

⁶⁶ Cfr. ORIHUELA, José Luis & SANTOS, María Luisa, "Guía para el diseño y evaluación de proyectos de comunicación digital", in BEL MALLÉN, José Ignacio (coord.), *Comunicar para crear valor. La dirección de comunicación en las organizaciones*, Eunsa, Pamplona, 2004, pp. 397-416.

⁶⁷ Cfr. VILLANUEVA, Julián, ACED, Cristina et al., *op. cit.*; CELAYA, Javier & HERRERA, Pablo, *op. cit.*; CELAYA, Javier, *op. cit.*; Lee, Sang, Hwang, Taewon & Lee, Hong-Hee, *op. cit.*; Herring, Susan, SCHEIDT, Lois Ann et al., *op. cit.*; ORIHUELA, José Luis et al., *op. cit.*; ORTIZ DE ZÁRATE, Alberto, *op. cit.*

quality of a blog, and reduced the number of items that were ultimately part of the quality index (BQI) to 27. The following were considered positive: having a corporate URL, being written by a group of workers, a mention of the blog author's links to the company, a Creative Commons license, the inclusion of an internal search engine, a link to the home page from any page of the blog, including trackback, organization of the information sections, a posting frequency above the average for the blogs analyzed, use of a blogroll, citing sources of information, inviting users to participate, using images and video in articles, links to social networks (Twitter, Facebook, Flickr, Delicious, LinkedIn and others), an enabled comment system, users answered by means of a second feedback, the opportunity to distribute the article on social networks, and the use of hypertext and some sort of RSS system.

Table 1. BQI variables

Categories	Variables
Authorship	It is written by a group of workers.
	The author's relationship with the company is made clear.
	It has own URL address.
Updating	The frequency of
	Images are used in the
	It cites sources of information.
	Video is used in the
Usability	Information is structured in sections.
	There is a link to the home page on the subpages.
	It has an internal search engine.
	It uses a
Interactivity	RSS.
	It has a link to trackbacks.
	It includes a system for comments.
	Users are invited to participate.
	The company responds to user feedback (second
	It uses
	Hypertext is used in the

Categories	Variables
Virality	There is a link to the company's Twitter feed.
	There is a link to the company's Facebook channel.
	There is a link to the company's Flickr.
	There is a link to the company's Del.icio.us.
	There is a link to the company's LinkedIn profile.
	There are links to other social networks.
	Users are given the opportunity to share the
	Users are given the opportunity to share the
	Users are given the opportunity to share the

All the variables in the BQI are dummies (0-1), so that a value of 0 was coded when the company blog did not have the characteristic and 1 when it did. Each blog analyzed was therefore able to obtain a score from 0 to 27. When carrying out other statistical analyses (ANOVA and factorial), we decided to consider the dummy variables on a scale of 0-1 and obtain the mean. Every company and business sector is therefore at a point on the index of quality (0-1) according to the mean. For example, if a blog has obtained a mean of 0.575, this means that it meets 57.5% of the quality criteria.

2.2. Sample selection

Given the need to select the largest Spanish companies to analyze their blogs, we decided to consult additional sources that would cover the largest number of indicators: size, profits, market value, financial assets, number of employees, etc. First, we consulted the '5,000 largest companies index' published every year by Iberinform for the magazine *Actualidad Económica*, which includes companies with a consolidated net income of over 35 million euros. We took the top hundred companies from the list for 2010, and found 43 organizations with a corporate blog.

We then reviewed the *Forbes* ranking of the 2,000 leading corporations in the world –*The Global 2000*– updated in April 2010, and found 29 Spanish companies, of which 11 were already included in the *Actualidad Económica*, and these were discarded. Eleven of the remaining eighteen had their own corporate blog. This *Forbes* classification took place taking four indicators into account: sales, utilities, assets and market value.

To complete the selection, we consulted the Ibex 35, which expanded the sample with another five new companies, of which only one had its own

blog. The Ibx 35 –the Iberia Index– is the main benchmark index for the Spanish stock market, is produced by Bolsas y Mercados Españoles (BME) and consists of the 35 companies with the most liquidity as listed in the Stock Exchange Inter-connection System (SIBE) on the four Spanish Stock Exchanges (Madrid, Barcelona, Bilbao and Valencia). This index is weighted by market capitalization, i.e. not all the companies in it have the same weight.

The final analysis, conducted between January and April 2011, showed that 55 of the 123 companies reviewed had an official corporate blog, although because several of these organizations were part of business groups with identical communication channels, the number of different blogs was reduced to 38. As we decided to analyze a maximum of two blogs in companies with various channels, the total number of units was 56.

Table 2. Companies selected for the research study

Abengoa	Acciona Infraestructuras
Arcelormittal España	Automóviles Citroën España
Banco de Sabadell Banking	Banco
Bankinter Banking	BBVA-Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Banking
Bolsas & Mercados Diversified Financials	CAM Group Banking
Centros Comerciales Carrefour	Cepsa
El Corte Inglés	Endesa
FCC Construcción	Ferrovial Agroman
General Motors España	Grupo Catalana Occidente Insurance
Hewlett Packard Española	Iberia Líneas Aéreas de España
Inditex	Indra Sistemas
Mapfre Insurance	Mercedes-Benz España
Michelin	Nissan Motor Ibérica
Ono	Orange
Petronor	Prisa Media
Renault España	Repsol YPF
Siemens	Telecinco
Telefónica	Vodafone España
Volkswagen Audi España	Criteria Caixa Diversified Financials

2.3. Objectives

1) This study focuses on three basic objectives:

Based on the criteria that the specialist literature has identified as characteristics of a high quality blog, we created the BQI and applied it to obtain a ranking of companies and sectors.

2) We checked which of the five categories (authorship, updating and content, usability, interactivity and virality) that define a quality blog are more powerful in the companies analyzed.

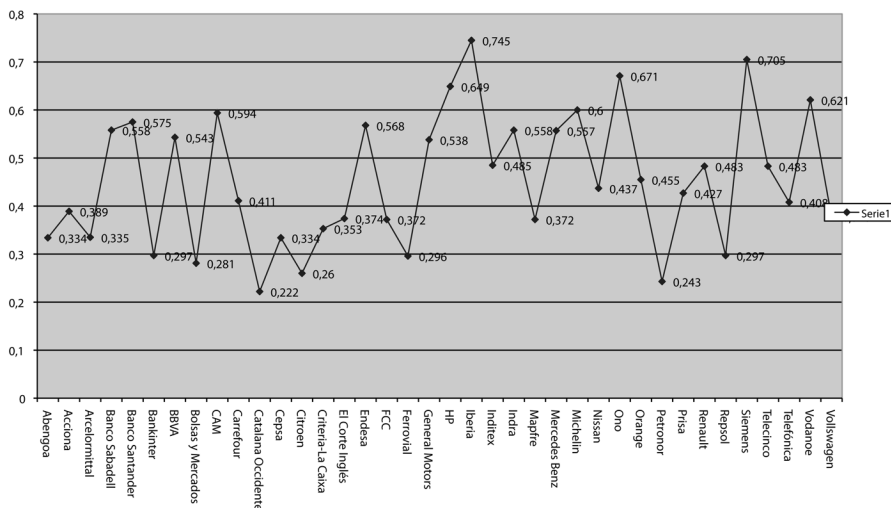
3) Finally, we used factorial analysis of the main components to see how the five categories are related to each other.

3. Results

3.1. Application of the BQI

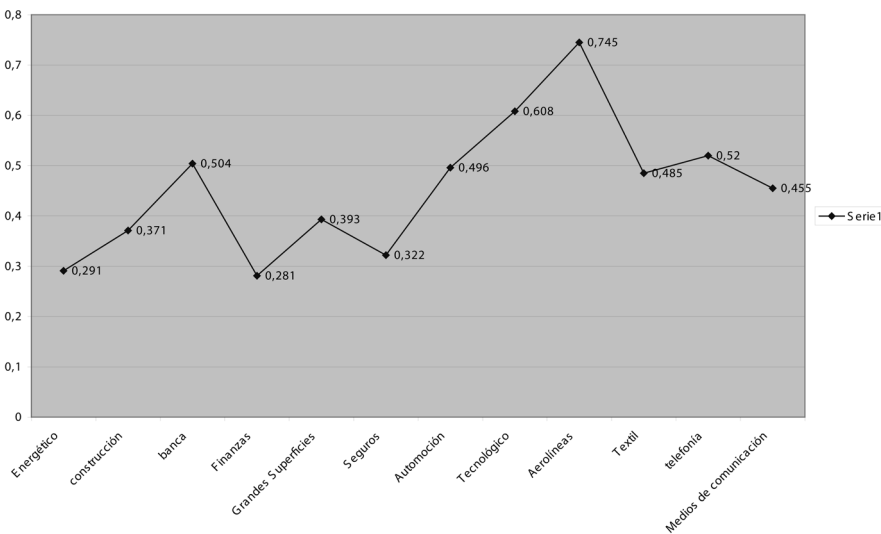
As shown in Figure 1, the mean obtained by Spanish firms is less than the pass mark, i.e. the series of blogs analyzed as a whole only meets 45% of the established quality criteria. Iberia is the company that best developed its corporate blog, with an average score of 0.745, only closely followed by Siemens, with 0.705. Falling short of good, but with an acceptable degree of compliance, are Ono (0.671), HP (0.649), Vodafone (0.621), Michelin (0.6), Caja de Ahorros del Mediterráneo (0.594), Banco de Santander (0.575), Endesa (0.568), Indra (0.558), Banco de Sabadell (0.558), Mercedes Benz (0.557), BBVA (0.543) and General Motors (0.538). The other Spanish companies fail in the quality index, and the lower end of the list contains Catalana Occidente, Petronor, Citroen, Bolsas y Mercados and Ferrovial.

Graph 1. Quality index by company



If we analyze the quality of corporate blogs according to the economic sector to which the company belongs, we find that airlines are in first place thanks to Iberia. They are followed by the technology sector, which meets 60% of the criteria, followed by telephony (52%) and banking (50%). Only four sectors therefore pass the quality index. Companies specializing in construction (37%), insurance (32%), energy (29%) and finance (28%) are the least ‘excellent’ in their management of corporate blogs.

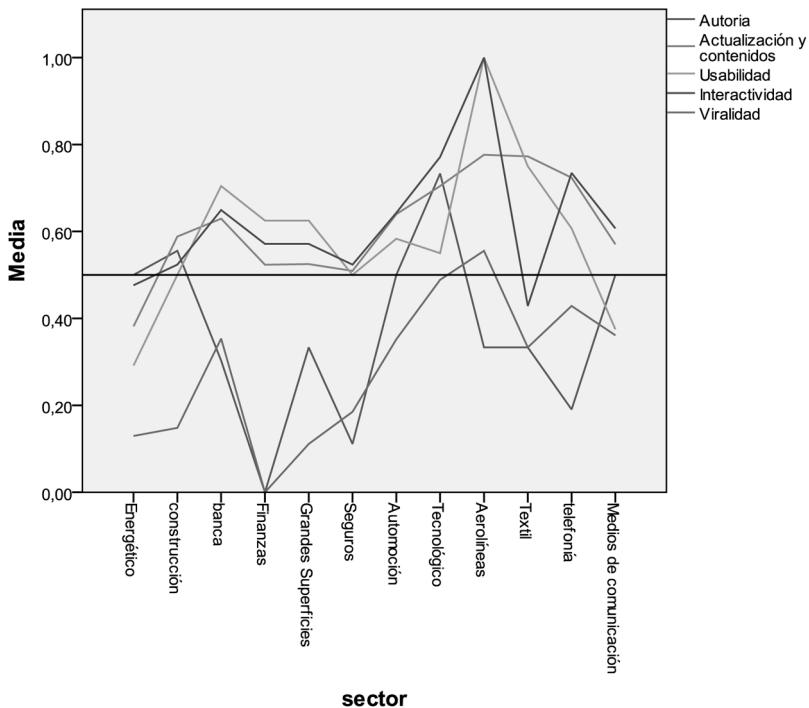
Graph 2. Quality index by sector



authorship criteria are met to the greatest extent in the technologies sector ($M = 0.73$, $SD = 0.36$).

Depending on the business sector (Figure 3), ANOVA analysis only shows significant differences for the authorship factor ($F = 2,491$, 0.018), while in the other four categories the differences in the means are not significant, and as such the firms in the sample can be said to apply the same type of management to their blogs. First, we noted how the three best placed sectors in the ICB behave –airlines, technology and telephony. These three have the highest score in the interactivity factor (100%, 77% and 73% of criteria met, respectively). The next bloc (banking, automobiles, textiles and media) is much more homogenous, since while banking meets the criteria of usability (70%) and textiles of updating (77%) to the greatest extent, automobiles and media obtained the highest percentages in interactivity (64% and 60% respectively). Of the last five sectors, only insurance and finance are both in the interactivity sector (52% and 57%).

Graph 3. BQI categories by business sector



Finally, we performed a principal component factor analysis with varimax rotation on the five blogs of the BQI⁶⁸ (table 1). The objective was to examine how the five characteristics of blogs in the sample analyzed are related to each other. The results show the formation of two factors, which refer to two ways to design a blog. The first correlates interactivity, updating and content and virality, and explains 44.9% of the variance. This factor ($\epsilon = 0.728$) tells us that in the blogs in which the promotion of interactivity predominates, resources to ensure updated content and links to social networks also feature heavily. The second factor explains the 24.9% of the variance and relates the criteria of authorship and usability negatively, but the factor scores show that criterion of usability has greater weight. These are the blogs in which their administrators have prioritized ease of use. By business sector, the first model contains airlines, telephony, banking and textiles, while the second contains technology, energy, construction, media and automobiles.

Table 3. Factorial analysis of components (varimax)

	Factor 1	Factor 2
Interactivity	,840	
Updating and content	,778	
Virality	,771	
Authorship		,886
Usability		-,676

4. Conclusions

The Blog Quality Index (BQI) is a valuable tool in assessing the potential of corporate blogs, and also enables various features to be compared, faults detected and opportunities for improvement in the use of this 2.0 channel communication proposed. Its use provides companies with the opportunity to quantitatively measure the level of excellence in the overall development of the blog or in each of the five categories in the index: authorship, content and updating, usability, interactivity and virality.

⁶⁸ The factorial analysis was statistically significant ($\epsilon = 55.010$, $df = 10$, $p \leq .000$), $KMO = 0.625$ and a explained variance of 69%.

The application of the BQI to Spanish companies clearly shows that there is a great deal of room for improvement in the management of corporate blogs, as only 45% of the series met the quality criteria established. By sector, good results were obtained by the aviation, technology, telephony and banking industries, which occupy the top four positions in the index, and present a more positive use of their blogs and a positive blog management. However, companies in the automotive, textile, media, supermarkets, construction, insurance, energy and finance sectors failed. In the company rankings, the Iberia and Siemens blogs were outstanding, and met more than 70% of the criteria, while Catalana Occidente, Petronor, Citroen, Bolsas y Mercados and Ferrovial were the companies with the least effective development of this tool.

The results obtained when the degree of compliance with each of the categories was analyzed shows a limited use of the viral capacity of blogs, with the inclusion of corporate profiles on social networks facilitating feedback of the content and transfer of users often neglected. However, interactivity, updating, content and usability were the features best exploited by Spanish companies. When establishing authorship, most companies do not follow recommendations for best practices and miss the opportunity to increase the confidence of their target audience by 'humanizing' their corporate voice.

Factorial analysis combines the five categories in two ways. The first factor shows that some companies consciously or unconsciously design blogs in which updating, interactivity and the search for visibility in social networks feature heavily. In the second, the main objective of some blogs is to encourage usability among their clients.

The study has some limitations that need to be mentioned. The blog analysis was performed on specific dates and due to the highly unstable environment of the social media, further studies are likely to provide different results. It is also worth noting that despite being based on a thorough review of previous research, the factors comprising the quality index are subjective, and new items that would force us to rethink its composition may appear.

However, the strength of the BQI lies in its ability to be applied to future research in different sectors and countries, and even to analyze the evolution of this platform over time. In short, it is a useful tool for assessing the quality of blogs, performing corporate analysis and studying the development of the various categories in depth.

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Anexo. Nombre y dirección Url de los blogs corporativos analizados

Empresa	Nombre
1. Abengoa	Soluciones innovadoras para el desarrollo sostenible
2. Acciona Infraestructuras	Reivindicamos la sostenibilidad
	Canal empleo
3. Arcelormittal España	Web TV 2010
4. Automóviles Citroën España	El contrato del año
5. Banco de Sabadell Banking	Sabadell. Sala de prensa
	Sabadell. El blog
6. Banco	Fundación Banco de Santander
	Becarixs
7. Bankinter Banking	Bankinter Labs
8. BBVA-Banco Bilbao Vizcaya Banking	Planta 29
	Actibva
9. Bolsas & Mercados Diversified Financials	El blog del Ibx 35
	El blog de Hechos Relevantes
10. CAM Group Banking	Bitácoras CAM
	El blog de Camon
11. Centros Comerciales Carrefour	Yo llego a fin de mes
12. Cepsa	On the road
13. Critería Caixa Diversified Financials	El bloc de
	A favor del mar
14. El Corte Inglés	Oh la moda Blog
	Oh la moda Personal Shopper
15. Endesa	Twenergy
16. FCC Construcción	Sala de comunicación
17. Ferrovial Agroman	Maji Ni Uhai
18. General Motors España	Driving conversations blog
	Astra blog
19. Grupo Catalana Occidente Insurance	El rincón del mano celeste
20. Hewlett Packard Española	The HP Blog Hub Tech Trends
	Coffee Coaching - HP y Microsoft Blog en español

Empresa	Nombre
21. Iberia Líneas Aéreas de España	Me gusta volar
22. Inditex	Pullthemetall
23. Indra Sistemas	Neo, ideas e innovación
24. Mapfre Insurance	Formando comunidad
	El blog de Ycar
25. Mercedes-Benz España	Mercedes-Benz Reporter. Sharing the Mercedes-Benz experience
26. Michelin	Circula seguro
27. Nissan Motor Ibérica	Jukers.es. Energised Community
28. Ono	Oblog
29. Orange	Oh my phone!
	Profesor Bot
30. Petronor	Ingurunor
	Vida inteligente
31. Prisa Media	La comunidad de bloggers de cadenaser.com
	Fronteras movedizas
32. Renault España	Renault Z.E. Blog
33. Repsol YPF	Blog de Dani Pedrosa
	Cuchara de palo
34. Siemens	Siemens PLM Software Blog
	The energy collective
35. Telecinco	Del uno al cinco
	Blog de
36. Telefónica	Un paso más. Blog de voluntariado
	Un paso más. Blog de debate y conocimiento.
37. Vodafone España	Smart blog
	Cooking ideas
38. Volkswagen Audi España	Salón de lectura
	Sailing experience