

La organización de eventos responsables en España como técnica de relaciones públicas

The organization of responsible events in Spain as a public relations technique

Salvador Hernández-Martínez¹

David Sánchez-Hervás²

Resumen: *Este trabajo se centra en averiguar si una selección de organizaciones privadas españolas, tienen en cuenta criterios de sostenibilidad a la hora de organizar sus eventos. Para esta investigación se ha utilizado una metodología cuantitativa, en la que, a través del análisis de contenido, se verifica si los eventos que realizan estas organizaciones siguen criterios de sostenibilidad. El análisis se centra específicamente en los informes no financieros o memorias de sostenibilidad, que estas empresas elaboran y difunden de manera pública.*

Palabras clave: *Eventos responsables; informes no financieros; organizaciones españolas.*

Abstract: *This work aims to find out if a selection of spanish private organizations, consider sustainability criteria when organising their events. We used a quantitative methodology, in which, through content analysis, it is verified if the events carried out by this organizations, follow sustainability criteria. The analysis is specifically focused on the non-financial reports or sustainability reports, which are drawn up to be prepared and disseminated by large companies.*

Keywords: *Responsible events; non-financial reports; spanish organizations.*

1 San Antonio Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM). Murcia, Espanha.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2633-0476>. E-mail: shernandez@ucam.edu

2 San Antonio Catholic University of Murcia (UCAM). Murcia, Espanha.
<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8408-5985>. E-mail: dsanchez@ucam.edu

Introducción

Corporate social responsibility (hereinafter CSR) is a form of management that has been incorporated into organisations on a voluntary basis as an instrument at the service of transparency and the promotion of the corporate image. In the middle of the 20th century, Bowen (1953) laid the foundations for the current RSC. The author indicated that organisations not only have economic responsibilities, but also labour, environmental and social ones.

This voluntary management scheme has become, in some respects, mandatory for certain organisations. In Spain, there is a regulation on the application of CSR when it comes to the management of organisations. On the one hand, the Transparency Law 19/2013, which aims to regulate and guarantee access to information on public activity. On the other hand, a Royal Decree, law 18/2017, which obliges organisations that meet a series of requirements to disclose their non-financial (economic, social and environmental) and diversity information.

Public Relations, which is a part of the activity of organisations, have also been incorporating CSR into their actions, as is the case with events. The organisation of events is an extremely valuable Public Relations technique. It allows the positive promotion of the organisation's image to its stakeholders and has also incorporated standards and criteria on CSR and sustainability.

In general, an event could be described as sustainable according to the United Nations Environment Programme - UNEP- as one “designed, organised and developed in such a way as to minimize potential negative environmental impacts, and leave a beneficial legacy for the host community and all those involved” (SUSTAINABLE EVENTS, 2022). On the other hand, a standard for the organisation of sustainable events also exists, ISO 20121. Said standard establishes certain characteristics for an event to be considered sustainable such as inclusivity, integrity, responsibility, and transparency (ISO 20121, 2013). That is why this work aims to check whether organisations use criteria of responsibility and sustainability when organising their events.

Theoretical framework

Definition of Events

In its third meaning, the Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy defines an Event as an “important and scheduled occurrence, of a social, academic, artistic or sporting nature” (DRAE, 2021). If we turn to specialised authors in this field, we find more detailed definitions. Rosario (2014) links it to the concept of happenings. According to this author, events are organised happenings that bring together several people to share common activities with similar purposes.

Along these lines, Otero (2011) states that the term event belongs to the field of happenings, understood as a form of communication in which it is necessary to take into account the types of media to be used, the type of audience to be addressed as well as determining the variables to be applied in each case, depending on the circumstances and the organisation that promotes said event.

Fuente (2004), in addition to defining the term, explains the basic parts that compose it, equating the concepts of events and activities. For this author both consist of the development of a function aimed at fulfilling objectives. They are divided into four parts: a start or welcome, the development of the main objective, a meeting of a social nature and a farewell.

When talking about the event as a happening, Xifra (2003) also insists on the need to have an extremely well-defined theme around which the organisation will revolve, this author believes that this is the first requirement that must be fulfilled. Furthermore, a specific theme must be created and the space to be occupied must be considered. The physical, professional, commercial, economic, or sociocultural level also needs to be considered.

Bassat (2008) goes even further by stating that an event can be the essence of a brand’s communication, as the character of the brand is intrinsic to the character of the event.

Other authors stress the rapid evolution that events are undergoing in recent years. Gandiaga (2017) indicates that companies and brands are looking for audiences that are more emotionally involved. For this reason, a 360-degree organisation, which allows them to connect more directly and authentically, is needed. This evolution makes it possible for new technologies, lighting, image design, programmes, augmented reality, and other factors that enhance its appeal and communicative capacity to gain importance.

The value of organizing events to improve the communication of an organisation with its audiences is clear, but to what field of communication does the organisation belong? Clearly to Public Relations. Sánchez-González (2016), relates the organisation of events as a communicative strategy that enables the purpose of Public Relations to be fulfilled. This is achieved by selecting the public and organising and distributing all the elements of that event, which allows to direct a certain message to specialised audiences: the stakeholders. Therefore, the current understanding of event organisation considers the staging of events to be an important Public Relations technique.

The organisation of events as a PR technique

Di Genova directly relates PR to events, defining them as “a strategic management system that allows events to be understood from the point of view of the multiple interactions that characterise them” (DI GENOVA, 2012, p.12). Moreover, he further insists on the value of events as a key element to establish the strategic planning of public relations that enables the effective access of the organisation to its audiences.

Additionally, Salla García and Ortega Soriano, describe the organisation of events as another activity of the public relations professional, who has the goal of “publicising the organisation in a calculated way, so that it becomes news and projects a positive image to the media as well as the public.” (SALLA; ORTEGA, 2008, p. 169)

Di Génova also sees the organisation of events as a tactical management tool for Public Relations. Events have a double impact for

organisations, as they make it possible to achieve benefits both for the pursuit of commercial or social objectives as well as for communicational and institutional ones. He also insists on the strategic value of events when stating that “due to the nature of the issues with which events deal –image, connection with the public, business, interpersonal relationships–, an event generates a series of actions that have an impact on organisational goals, short, medium and long term.” (DI GENOVA, 2012, p. 203).

Xifra (2003), does not hesitate to define them as a PR technique, emphasising their value when it comes to drawing attention and making publicity with the aim of creating news. Pulido also affirms this categorically by referring to the organisation of events as one of the main and most effective public relations techniques that organisations of various kinds use to deliver messages to their audiences, “aimed at producing a favourable environment for the strategic development of their goals and objectives” (PULIDO, 2012, pp, 227-228).

Types of events

There are a wide range of bibliographical references that classify events in highly diverse way. According to Otero, when classifying them, we should consider that any type of event must provide the organising entity with credibility and trust and “provide it with a relational value that constitutes an organisation that is firmly established in the community” (OTERO, 2011, p.32).

Furthermore, Jiménez Morales and Alonso Panizo (2017) categorise events according to their dimension, their content, and the target audience, differentiating between the types reflected in the following graph.

Figure 1: Types of Events.



Source: Jiménez-Morales, 2017, p. 33

The President of the MICE Forum, Luis Gandiaga (2017), also adds that depending on the type of event, its format will be different, distinguishing between a press conference, an open day, and a convention. According to him, what matters is to create a unique experience with an emotional effect that links the attendee to the organisation in order to ensure that the message effectively reaches the public.

After a detailed analysis of the main authors, Campos and Fuente (2013) provide an extremely precise classification of corporate events, which we found to be ideal for the analysis of the events in this research. Specifically, and taking into account the objectives of the companies, they make the following distinctions:

1. Celebration events, such as an anniversary, commemoration, or party.
2. Training events, such as conferences, conventions, meetings, and congresses.
3. Motivational events, such as conventions and/or meetings, product presentations, etc.

4. Recognition events, such as awarding prize(s) and/or recognitions.
5. Institutional events, such as inaugurations, open days, visits to facilities.
6. Corporate events, such as a shareholders' meeting or meetings of the board of directors.
7. Commercial and product launch/presentation events. Fairs would also be included in this category.
8. Promotional events, such as brand positioning events; travelling, road shows, street-marketing, samplings.
9. Protocol events, attended by official authorities, both nationally and internationally.
10. Incentive events, such as incentive trips or other types of events that incentivise participants.
11. Responsible/solidarity events which, according to the authors, must take the corporate responsibility policy into account when they are designed and seek to transfer the company's commitment to society.
12. Sustainable Events/Green Events. Events which pursue the objective of respecting and caring for the environment.
13. Cultural events. Those that belong to the leisure and culture industry, which can be distinguished as cultural versus musical events.
14. Sporting events, related to sporting activity or competition.
15. Sponsorship Events. Events financed in part or in full by a company.
16. Other events and formats. Those that are not included in the previous categories.

For this research, we believe it is necessary to place special emphasis on the category of sustainable events, which we will focus on. In this sense, this type of event will be defined in more detail, relating it to the ISO 20121 standard, which establishes the criteria that events must meet to be considered sustainable.

The ISO 20121 standard for the organisation of sustainable events

Strictly speaking, the most accurate way to define a sustainable event is to relate it to the norm that regulates said event and which establishes the standards for its organisation. In this way, a sustainable event could be defined as one that incorporates principles of or for sustainable development in all its management phases and activities. Therefore, a sustainable event is one that is conceived, designed, planned, executed, and reviewed under the scope of an ISO 20121 Event Sustainability Management System. (CAVALA, 2021).

Origin of the ISO 20121 standard

As Bakos (2019) details in his doctoral thesis, the interest in creating ISO 20121 dates back to 2004 and London's bid for the 2012 Summer Olympic and Paralympic Games. At a promotional event for this venue, in July 2005, David Stubbs, the London Organizing Committee (LOCOG) Head of Sustainability, proposed innovative ways to offer a sustainable event. As Bakos points out, during this time the events industry in general was becoming increasingly aware of the need to integrate more sustainable practices when organising events. This growing need, coupled with London's bid for the 2012 games as a catalyst, led to the creation of the British National Standard BS8901 in 2007. This standard specified the requirements for a sustainability management system that could be adopted by any event management company.

In order to facilitate the management criteria for users, a second version of BS8901 was published in 2009. This new version was well received internationally by organisers of high-profile events such as the UN Copenhagen Climate Conference. As Bakos (2019) details, in response to the momentum the standard was gaining, in 2008 a joint proposal from the standard's originator group, BSI, was submitted to Brazil's national standards body (ABNT) to develop the national

standard into an ISO standard. After much deliberation, the final vote on ISO 20121 took place on 30 May 2012. After receiving approval, ISO 20121 was officially launched in the summer of 2012 to coincide with the London Olympic and Paralympic Games.

Criteria covered by ISO 20121

ISO 20121 determines the requirements, with user recommendations, necessary to consider and include sustainability criteria in the management of any event throughout all stages of the process: design, organisation, planning, execution, development, review, and post-event activities (ISO 20121, 2013)

On the other hand, this standard was highly necessary, given that events have a considerable environmental impact on the areas in which they take place, in addition to the economic and social impact that must be taken into account when organising them. This range of impacts occurs from the initial design of the event to the actions that take place after the event, so the inclusion of sustainability criteria throughout this process is essential (ISO 20121, 2013).

And what are the characteristics that a sustainable event must meet according to ISO 20121?

1. **Inclusivity.** Understood as the practice of fair treatment and meaningful participation of all stakeholders in the sustainable event. Inclusion refers to all stakeholders, regardless of race, age, gender, colour, religion, sexuality, orientation, culture, origin, income, disability (mental, intellectual, sensory, and physical), or any other form of discrimination.
2. **Integrity.** Adherence to the ethical principles of honesty, transparency, and adequate behaviour according to international standards of accepted behaviour.
3. **Responsibility.** Responsible commitment to sustainable development through the environmental, social, and economic footprint of a sustainable event. Also, the social progress and the value contribution

it provides to individuals, organisations, communities and competent authorities.

4. Transparency. Degree of openness of an organisation about the decisions and activities that affect society, the economy and the environment, and its willingness to communicate said decisions and activities in a clear, precise, timely, honest, and integral manner. Transparency also includes openness about the results of decisions and activities (CAVALA, 2022).

Therefore, a sustainable event in the strict sense of the word is one that meets these characteristics. The next question would be whether the companies that are considered more responsible in our country organise sustainable events. To determine if this is the case, this research will analyse whether the events organised by the companies rated as the most responsible in Spain according to the ranking of the corporate reputation business monitor MERCO meet the characteristics defined in ISO 20121.

Methodology

The main objective of this work is to verify if the most responsible organisations in Spain take into account criteria of social responsibility and sustainability when organising their events. To this end, the following specific objectives are established:

1. Accurately define the concept of a sustainable event.
2. Analyse the types of events carried out by the most responsible Spanish organisations through their non-financial information reports.
3. Determine, through this analysis, which organisations carry out sustainable events and check whether they have any specific certification.
4. Identify if the events analysed follow some of the criteria and characteristics of inclusivity, integrity, responsibility, and transparency that are contemplated in the ISO 20121 Standard on sustainable events.

To carry out the work, a quantitative methodology is used in which, through a pilot study, a content analysis is conducted to verify if the events carried out by the most responsible organisations follow sustainability criteria. Content analysis allows us to accurately measure the social reality (GARCIA; BERGANZA, 2005), and in this specific case, the reality of what is stated in the non-financial information reports (sustainability or social responsibility reports) of the most important responsible organisations in Spain.

The starting hypothesis is the following: the most responsible organisations in Spain are aware of the value of the adequate organisation of events for a suitable corporate image and, in this sense, they comply with the characteristics of inclusivity, integrity, responsibility, and transparency in the organisation of their activities, following the indications included in the ISO 20121 standard.

In order to verify this, the analysis focused on the most responsible private organisations. To make the selection, the latest ranking prepared by MERCOSUR on companies with the best responsibility and corporate governance in Spain, that of 2020, was taken as a reference. MERCOSUR was chosen since it is one of the rankings with the most complete methodology (CARRERAS et al., 2013). Specifically, it evaluates 40 variables on social responsibility in organisations based on more than 10,000 surveys of twelve interest groups. In addition, it was the first ranking in the world to have its processes audited by an external body, specifically by the consulting firm KPMG, and the first to meet the criteria of the ISAE 3000 standard, a standard to guarantee the non-financial information of organisations (MERCOSUR, 2022).

As it was a pilot study, the first 41 organisations were selected for analysis, out of the 100 included in the ranking. The pilot study allows testing the reliability of the methodology for a future analysis on a larger scale (DÍAZ-MUÑOZ, 2020). Despite this, a selection of the representative sample was made, with a confidence level of 90% and a margin of error of 10%.

Once the organisations had been selected, the content published in the non-financial information and diversity reports was analysed. This document was chosen as it is the one that contains all the information on sustainability that the organisations provide. Specifically, it compiles the following information:

- Environmental issues: This should include information on pollution, circular economy, waste management, sustainable use of resources, climate change and biodiversity protection, among others.
- Social and employee issues: This should include information on figures and measures taken in relation to employment, work organisation, health and safety at work, social relations, training, accessibility, and equality.
- Respect for Human Rights: This should include data on their application, as well as complaints about cases of violation and compliance with conventions, among others.
- Fight against corruption and bribery: This should include information on the measures adopted.
- Society: This should include information on sustainable development, subcontracting and suppliers, consumer complaints and tax information, among others.

According to Law 11/2018, these reports must be drafted and published on the website of all organisations with more than 500 employees or that are of public interest, among other requirements (this is the social responsibility or sustainability report that some organisations voluntarily published before the law). These requirements are met by all the organisations included in the MERCO ranking (MERCO, 2022) on companies with the best corporate responsibility and governance in Spain in 2020. In addition, as indicated in the law, organisations are obliged to publish the reports on their websites, which facilitates and ensures access to information.

In the analysis, the latest reports published by the organisations were selected. As indicated above, these reports are mandatory for organisations that meet the requirements established in Law 11/2018. However, despite this, during the analysis it was detected that not all organisations had made said reports accessible. In those cases, the last published report was analysed.

In order to carry out the research, a coding protocol was created to specifically analyse the non-financial information reports. The following keywords were used to search the reports for all information related to the development of events:

- **Event:** The documents were searched for the word event, as well as for similar terms such as happening, forum, or activities.
- **Certification:** A search for this term was also carried out in order to detect whether any certification is applied for the organising of sustainable events. Therefore, the names of the most relevant certifications in the field of events such as ISO 20121, Eventsost certification and Biosphere certification were included in the keywords.

In total, 8 keywords were proposed to meet the objectives set. In addition, in order to collect the data, an analysis sheet was designed in which the following variables were included:

- **Identification and location:** in which the name of the organisation, its position in the MERCO ranking (MERCO, 2022), the sector of activity (information provided by the monitor itself) and the website of the non-financial information report analysed were indicated.
- **Event type:** The classification of events was based on the proposal by Campos and Fuente (2013), developed within the theoretical framework, which can be summarised as follows: celebratory, training, motivational, recognition, institutional, corporate, commercial and product launch/presentation, promotional, protocol, incentive, responsible or solidarity, sustainable or Green

Events, cultural, sporting, sponsorship and other events and formats that are not included in the categories above.

- Sustainable event: To determine whether it was a sustainable event, it had to meet at least one of the criteria included in the ISO 20121 Standard (ISO 20121, 2013) on inclusiveness, integrity, accountability, or transparency (developed in the theoretical framework). These criteria were not taken into account when they were only included in the theme of the event. Therefore, only events that took these criteria into account for their elaboration were considered as sustainable.
- Certifications: Finally, whether they held any event organisation certifications such as the ISO 20121 Standard, Biosphere and Eventsost certifications or other similar certifications was checked.

Once the data analysis sheet was completed, as recommended by Wimmer and Dominick (1996), a preparatory session was held to train the coders. In said session, after resolving possible discrepancies between the researchers, a guidance document was drawn up with the main guidelines for carrying out the analysis. This ensured that the coding protocol had a high degree of reliability.

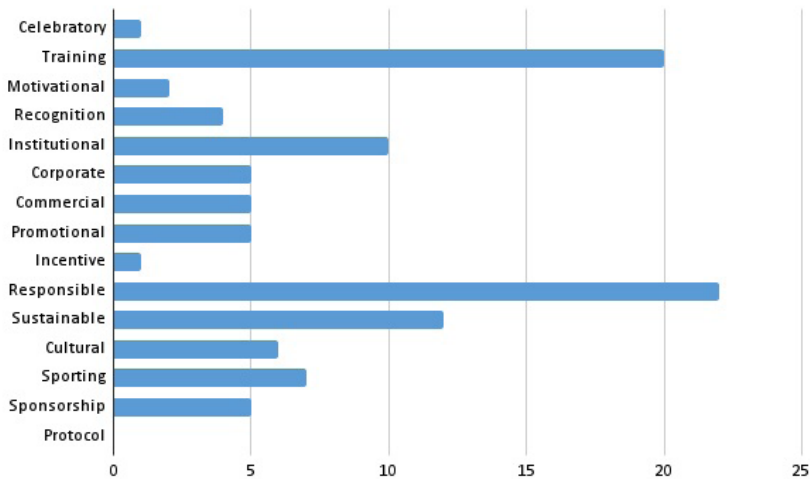
Results

The main result of this research indicates that only 11% of the most responsible organisations in Spain carry out events with the sustainability criteria set out in the ISO 20121 Standard (ISO 20121, 2013). According to their type, the events that the companies analysed organise the most are those with a responsible or solidarity theme and training events, with 21% and 19% respectively. Institutional events also account for 11%, and in the 6% to 4% range we can find cultural, sporting, sponsorship, promotional, commercial, corporate and recognition events.

Events with a less significant percentage of organisation are motivational events, with 2%, and celebratory and incentive events, with 1% each. The only type of event that is not reflected are the ones that are

considered protocol events. The following graph shows the results of the types of events organised by the most responsible organisations in Spain according to the MERCO ranking.

Figure 2: Events classification.



Source: Compiled by author

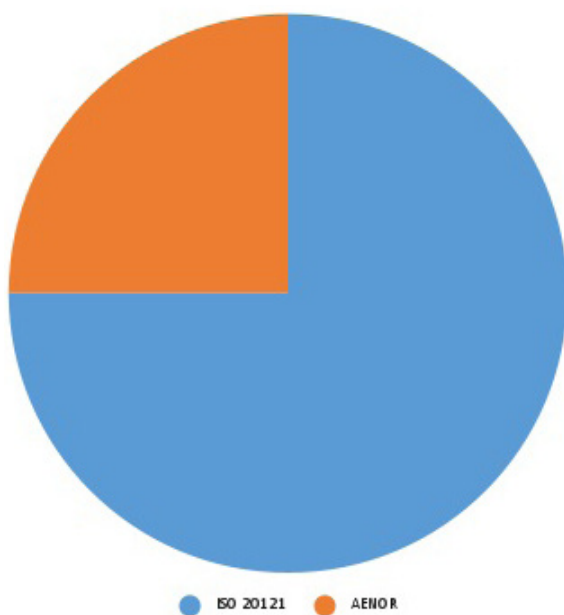
During the analysis it was also detected that, due to the pandemic, organisations have chosen to organise some of their events virtually. On the other hand, the COVID 19 crisis caused many organisations to substantially reduce the organisation of events.

If we focus on sustainable events, as can be seen in graph 3, it can be seen that the main criterion followed is responsibility. Specifically, 50% of the companies that organise sustainable events have taken into account aspects of environmental impact. Integrity was the next most considered criterion, accounting for 25%. The organisations have contemplated ethical principles such as honesty and adequate behaviour according to international standards for the organisation of their events.

Another of the most valued criteria was inclusiveness. 18% of the organisations which carry out sustainable events analysed have

contemplated aspects such as fair treatment and the participation of all the public involved, regardless of their sex, sexual orientation or disability, among others, for the organisation of their events. Regarding transparency, only one organisation, 5% of the total, has used this criterion for the organisation of its events.

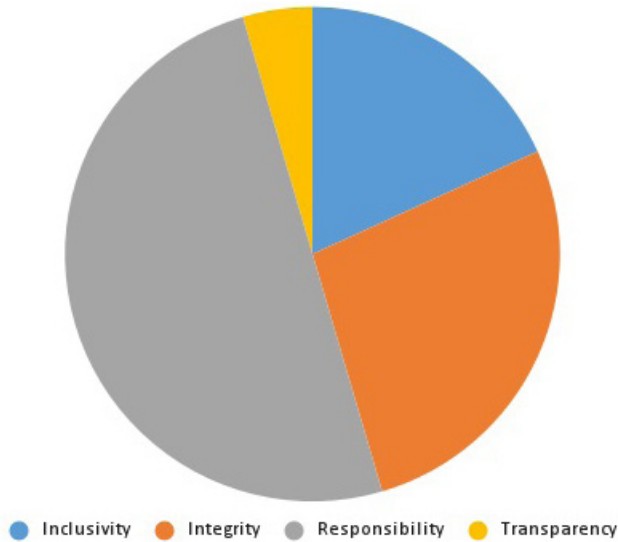
Figure 3: ISO 20121 Sustainable Events Criteria.



Source: Compiled by author

Finally, as shown in graph 4, only 4 of the 12 organisations that carry out sustainable events have external certification. Of said organisations, three have chosen to certify their events with ISO 20121 and one with the AENOR certification. Specifically, the organisations that have obtained a certification are the insurance company Mapfre and the electricity company Iberdrola, which have followed the ISO 20121 Standard, and Banco Santander, which has obtained a double certification for its sustainable events, both by the ISO 20121 Standard and by AENOR (Spanish Association for Standardization and Certification).

Figure 4: Certifications sustainable events.



Source: Compiled by author

Discussion and conclusions

One of the main conclusions of the work is that, despite the fact that the organisations examined are making considerable efforts in the field of sustainability and social responsibility, being aware of the value of this technique in their communication policy with their audiences, they are not integrating it in the management of their events. It is noteworthy that the ISO 20121 Standard on event sustainability management systems is scarcely applied in the most responsible organisations in Spain, despite being in force since 2013.

In short, few of the organisations which are considered more responsible in Spain are aware of the value of the correct and sustainable organisation of events for an adequate corporate image. Consequently, they do not meet the criteria of inclusivity, integrity, responsibility, and transparency in their organisation.

For this reason, the starting hypothesis of this research is clearly refuted. In it, it was indicated that the most responsible organisations in our country are aware of the value of the correct organisation of events for an adequate corporate image and, in this sense, they comply with the characteristics of inclusivity, integrity, responsibility and transparency in their organisation following the indications included in the ISO 20121 certificate.

Based on the results obtained, the starting hypothesis is far from being validated. However, it is noteworthy that most of the events organised by the companies analysed were responsible or supportive. Nevertheless, despite this, most of the sustainability criteria included in the ISO 20121 Standard for its preparation had not been considered.

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Sobre os autores

Salvador Hernández-Martínez - Professor of the Area in Advertising and Public Relations of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Doctor by the University of Seville. In the present article, the author contributed to: the project design, the theoretical framework, data collection, interpretation of results, writing of the manuscript, conclusions and the final revision.

David Sánchez-Hervás - Professor of the Area in Advertising and Public Relations of the Faculty of Communication Sciences, Doctor by the San Antonio Catholic University. In this article, the author contributed to: the project design, the elaboration of the methodology, data collection, interpretation of results, writing of the manuscript, conclusions and final revision of the manuscript.

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