



CSR as a strategic communication tool for subsidized schools in Madrid (Spain)

La RSC como herramienta de comunicación estratégica de los centros educativos concertados de Madrid (España)

Luis Felipe Solano Santos

Complutense University of Madrid. Spain.

fsolano@ucm.es



Patricia de Julián Latorre

International University of La Rioja (UNIR). Spain.

patricia.dejulian@unir.net



Davinia Martín Critikián

CEU San Pablo University. Spain.

davinia.martincritikian@ceu.es



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: Public relations and communication are essential for subsidized schools. Faced with challenges such as declining birth rates and a shortage of qualified teachers, it is crucial to differentiate oneself and enhance reputation. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) emerges as a strategic tool to attract and retain talent, students and improve the image so as to ensure the survival of state-funded schools. **Methodology:** The aim of this paper is to study the CSR performance of state-funded schools in Madrid by means of semi-structured interviews with the communication managers of the schools, a survey of families and a content analysis of their social networks and websites. A final proposal is added to assist schools wishing to integrate CSR into their communication plans. **Results:** The findings obtained reflect a lack of knowledge about communication and CSR by communications managers. While social media platforms do not adequately represent CSR activities, parents perceive their schools positively in terms of social and environmental contributions. There is a discrepancy between family perceptions, school initiatives, communication efforts, and the knowledge of communication managers regarding CSR. **Conclusions:** Subsidized schools engage in CSR activities as part of their educational mission but fail to utilize them as a strategic communication tool, resulting in limited visibility.

Keywords: Corporate Social Responsibility; subsidized schools in Madrid; Educational Social Responsibility; educational communication; semi-structured interviews; content analysis.

RESUMEN

Introducción: Las relaciones públicas y la comunicación son esenciales para los colegios concertados. Ante desafíos como la disminución de la natalidad y la escasez de profesorado preparado, es crucial diferenciarse y mejorar la reputación. La Responsabilidad Social Corporativa (RSC) emerge como una herramienta estratégica para atraer y retener talento, alumnos y mejorar la imagen para asegurar la supervivencia de los colegios concertados. **Metodología:** Este trabajo pretende estudiar cómo realizan la RSC los centros concertados de Madrid a través de la realización de entrevistas semiestructuradas a los responsables de comunicación de los centros, de una encuesta a las familias y del análisis de contenido de sus redes sociales y páginas web. Se añade una propuesta final que pretende ser de ayuda a los colegios que quieran comenzar a utilizar la RSC dentro de su plan de comunicación. **Resultados:** Los resultados obtenidos reflejan una falta de conocimiento sobre comunicación y RSC por parte de los dircoms. Las redes sociales no recogen las acciones de RSC realizadas, sin embargo, la percepción de los padres sobre la contribución que sus colegios a labores sociales y medioambientales es positiva. **Discusión:** Existe falta de coherencia entre lo que perciben las familias, lo que realiza el colegio, lo que se comunica y los conocimientos de los responsables de comunicación en el ámbito de la RSC. **Conclusiones:** Los colegios concertados realizan acciones de RSC porque va implícito en su proyecto educativo, pero no las utilizan como herramienta de comunicación estratégica y son muy limitadas.

Palabras clave: Responsabilidad Social Corporativa; colegios concertados de Madrid; Responsabilidad Social Educativa; comunicación educativa; entrevistas semiestructuradas; análisis de contenido.

INTRODUCTION

The current Spanish educational system has its origin in Article 27 of the current Spanish Constitution dated 1978. It is decentralized, that is to say, it has the educational competences transferred, so there are certain areas of application of the educational laws that depend exclusively on each of the 17 autonomous communities. Although it is true that there are differences from one community to another, all of them have some aspects in common, such as, for example, the types of educational centers that exist.

The Constitution also recognizes the freedom to create educational centers and, therefore, there are three types of non-university schools in Spain, depending on the main origin of the funds that support them and their

ownership: public, private and subsidized. The first type of centers, as their name indicates, are financed by the public administration (national and territorial) and they are managed by the educational authorities corresponding to each autonomous community. The non-subsidized private schools depend on the fees paid by the families who send their children to the school and on the capital provided by an institution, religious order, cooperative, company or foundation. Finally, in the case of private subsidized schools, the management is private but their financing is public through the so-called educational subsidies (Domínguez et al., 2022). The very preamble of the Organic Law of Education (1985) makes this classification clear: "a distinction is made between private centers that operate on a market basis, through price, and centers supported with public funds, and within the latter, private subsidized centers and those of public ownership" (BOE, 1995, p. 21015).

Taking into account these differences, the object of study of this research is the subsidized schools in the capital city of Madrid, which have the infant, primary and secondary education stages, which are mainly governed by the system of subsidies. The reasons for choosing this type of schools are described below.

Firstly, there are legal reasons. As explained above, subsidized schools must comply with a series of legal requirements if they intend to maintain their subsidy. As a result, after each educational law, they have to revise their educational project, ideology and internal organization. Since 1970, when General Basic Education (EGB in Spanish) was introduced through the General Education Law (LGE in Spanish), there have been eight different educational laws. The one which has caused the most controversy, debate and social movement is the Ley Orgánica 3, of Modification of the LOE (LOMLOE in Spanish, better known as the Celaá law), which was passed in 2020. This law changes the requirements that subsidized schools must comply with, in such a way that many of them are destined to lose their subsidy for not being able to meet them.

There are also economic reasons. According to the provisions of Real Decreto 2377/1985, of December 8, 1985, which approves the Regulations of Basic Standards on Educational Agreements, the owner of a private school that has an educational agreement is obliged to provide free of charge the teachings included in such subsidy. This regulation expressly prohibits receiving financial compensation, directly or indirectly, for the provision of these school programs. In addition, it specifies that the school's complementary school activities and services must be voluntary, non-discriminatory, not part of school hours and not for profit. Any collection of amounts related to these activities must be authorized by the competent educational administration (Real Decreto 2377, 1985). Despite this reality, subsidized schools state that they receive less money per student than public schools and, if they want to offer complementary and quality services, they need to charge a voluntary fee. According to the report of the State System of Education Indicators (2022) published by the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training, on average, the administration spends approximately €6.230 per year per student in a public school, thus covering 100% of the costs. However, for a student in a charter school, the allocation is around €3.000, about half of the costs.

Both the first reason, the legal one, and the economic one, can cause image and reputation problems for subsidized schools in the eyes of their stakeholders.

Thirdly, there are political reasons since, nowadays, there are lobby groups, social and political currents in favor of public education and against subsidized education, which are frequently supported by the media. This means that schools must show what they are and what they do, and therefore carry out a coherent communication to avoid generating a discourse about them that does not correspond to reality.

Socio-demographic reasons. The low birth rate is leading to the closure of classrooms and even entire schools. Taking a look at the birth rate graph in Spain, it has been declining for years, which has intensified since the COVID, evidenced by a 2% decrease in the number of births in 2022 compared to 2021, and an 8% reduction compared to 2019 (National Statistics Institute [INE in Spanish], 2023). This drop has a direct impact on the structure of the population pyramid, with significant repercussions on the stability of the education sector,

especially in relation to teaching and its professionals. An analysis of data from the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training shows that during the 2022-2023 academic year, the number of students enrolled in Early Childhood Education centers, covering the age from 0 to 5 years, was 1.584.094, showing a decrease of 2,4% with respect to the previous academic period (2021-2022), and in turn, a lower enrollment than that recorded in the 2020-2021 academic year. This trend of declining enrollment at the Early Childhood Education level has experienced a cumulative decline of 16,5% over the last decade.

Finally, there are work-related reasons. Professionals working in educational centers are increasingly demotivated as they consider that the compensation they get from their work does not match it (Solera et al., 2017). Also, the salaries and conditions of teachers in private schools are significantly lower than those in public schools. On the other hand, according to the study by Abanades (2020), students look for a good teacher who possesses mental, social and emotional balance, in addition to having social and communicative abilities and skills and active listening. In addition to the demands of students and families, the requirements of each Autonomous Community are becoming increasingly strict: C1 level of English and/or another language, digital competence and training, postgraduate studies, etc. This is making it difficult to find qualified teachers who meet all the training requirements of the law. They must be aligned with the educational project and the values of the school and be willing to work with the conditions of the subsidized education. The key for these schools is to attract and retain talent and to take care of their teachers from the point of view of internal communication and Corporate Social Responsibility.

Due to all these reasons, subsidized schools are forced to compete with each other for students and teachers. They have also begun to see the need to take care of their communication and manage it in a strategic and professional manner (de Julián, 2023). All this in order to differentiate themselves, improve their image and reputation, and attract and retain families and talented employees. Within this important mission, Corporate Social Responsibility (hereinafter CSR) is presented as a good communication and public relations tool to help schools meet their objectives (Gascón, 2023). It is assumed that subsidized schools, in general, carry out some CSR initiatives unconsciously because it is part of their educational project and part of their mission, vision and purpose, to favor, help and promote initiatives in favor of the environment, society, their workers and their internal management. However, they do not communicate it. The aim of this paper is to find out how CSR is carried out in subsidized schools and to establish what possibilities they have to improve and communicate in order to differentiate themselves and ensure their survival.

Finally, the reason why Madrid has been chosen as the universe of the study has a dual origin. On the one hand, being the capital of Spain, almost all educational institutions, foundations and organizations that operate subsidized schools have a presence in Madrid. On the other hand, according to the latest data published on this aspect by the Ministerio de Educación y Formación (2022), Madrid is one of the three communities with the highest percentage of subsidized schools in their respective territories. In contrast, the communities with the least presence of these schools are Extremadura, Andalusia and Castile La Mancha. There is, therefore, a notable disparity between the different regions. Madrid stands out as one of the autonomous communities with the highest number of subsidized schools, and this type of education is also in high demand by parents.

Studies on subsidized education in the Community of Madrid indicate that, in recent decades, this region has prioritized "freedom of choice" as a fundamental principle in various educational policies, thus generating a homogeneous educational offer and promoting competition among schools to attract students (Villamor & Prieto, 2016). In addition, there is a high social demand in this region for this type of education, which has resulted in an increase in the number of subsidized schools in recent years (Vicepresidencia, Consejería de Educación y Universidades, 2022).

OBJECTIVES

O1. To find out how the subsidized schools and educational institutions manage Corporate Social Responsibility and whether they use it as a strategic communication tool.

O1.1 To study the knowledge and opinion of parents regarding the CSR of their schools.

O1.2 To analyze the websites and social networks of a sample of subsidized schools to determine whether they carry out and communicate their CSR.

O1.3 To determine how the communication manager, person in charge or managerial staff deals with the CSR of schools and educational institutions.

O2. To make a proposal for CSR initiatives that can be applied in subsidized schools.

3. CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The importance of strategic communication and public relations in subsidized educational centers

The strategic and professional implementation of corporate communication is essential today for any organization (Capriotti, 2021), including educational institutions and subsidized schools. As highlighted in the introduction, educational institutions face various challenges, such as internal or external crises, image or reputation problems, the need to differentiate themselves in a highly competitive market, attract qualified students and teachers, effectively communicate their activities and the importance of their work, as well as publicize their mission, values, purpose and ideology, among other aspects. To channel all this, they need communication and public relations. However, communication is still an aspect that requires improvement in subsidized schools, as evidenced in the studies by Julián (2023) and Núñez-Fernández (2017). Only in higher education is there an investment of resources and more professional development in this regard.

For Martín-Critikián et al. (2022), strategic communication is of utmost importance in the context of subsidized education centers in Spain, where the convergence of educational objectives, linguistic diversity and community participation demand a holistic approach. It is a multidisciplinary field that draws on theories of communication, public relations, branding and management to develop comprehensive strategies that align with the overall objectives of an organization.

Within this multidisciplinary, Public Relations is especially relevant, as it is understood as a set of planned and continuous communication strategies aimed at strengthening connections with different audiences. These initiatives seek to listen, inform and persuade, with the aim of obtaining consensus, loyalty and support both in the present and in the future. In addition, Public Relations is nourished by methods and theories from different fields of knowledge, such as advertising, marketing, social communication, politics, psychology, sociology, among others (Maldonado et al., 2023).

All of this is done through various communication channels and involves coordinating messages across different platforms to ensure consistency and reinforce key themes. Integrated communication strategies are designed to create a unified and impactful presence in the minds of different audiences. Therefore, the key components of strategic communication within an academic framework include: (Jiménez-Sánchez et al., 2023)

- Objectives alignment: where strategic communication will be driven by organizational objectives. This will involve aligning communication efforts with broader objectives, such as improving accountability, increasing market engagement, encouraging stakeholder participation or achieving specific results.

- Target audience analysis: analyzing demographics, preferences, attitudes and behaviors to effectively customize messages to more efficiently target and address their needs and concerns more accurately.
- Paying attention to messages and media: developing messages that resonate with the target audience is a critical aspect of strategic communication. This involves selecting the appropriate language, tone and content to convey key information and elicit the right responses. Modern academic frameworks often stress the use of persuasion theories and rhetorical strategies to enhance the effectiveness of messages. In addition, strategic communication involves selecting the most appropriate communication channels to reach the target audience.
- Transparency, honesty and respect regarding diverse perspectives. Including ethics in communication is essential to build trust and maintain credibility in the long term.

Jiménez-Sánchez et al. (2023), argue along the same lines by stating that the Spanish educational landscape, characterized by the diversity resulting from the transfer of educational competencies to the different autonomous communities, social pressure and collaboration with various stakeholders, requires a clearly defined communication strategy.

Cuenca-Fontbona (2022) also argues that, through strategic communication, Spanish subsidized schools can not only face challenges effectively, but also cultivate an environment where students progress, parents participate and the community in general actively contributes to the success of these objectives.

Among all the tools and strategies involved in corporate communication and public relations more specifically, this paper will focus on CSR.

As for social media in schools, it has become an important part of the school community as it provides a quick and efficient way to communicate with students, parents and educational staff. Announcements, updates and events can reach a wide audience in a matter of seconds. In this context, it has been observed that schools and educational institutions use them mainly for communication and information purposes.

The following social networks have been chosen for the study: Twitter, Instagram and Facebook. These are the most used social networks in Spain by educational institutions. This study will determine which social networks will be used by each institution based on specific aspects such as geographic location, educational level and internal policies (López-Belmonte et al. 2020).

X (formerly Twitter): It is a very fast and agile social network. It is mainly used for quick activities, as well as to communicate with the educational community, share news and events, and promote interactive learning.

Instagram: It is mainly used to share photos and videos of school events, student projects and academic achievements, although its use tends to be more common at higher education levels.

Facebook: Its popularity is decreasing every year, but it continues to be relevant from the point of view of school communication and promotion of events, as well as to keep parents informed about school activities and important news.

3.2 Stakeholders of the subsidized school

In order to determine who will benefit from an educational institution's CSR and to understand the areas of action, as well as the possible strategies and tools, it is essential to know its internal and external audiences. Various authors have defined the stakeholders of an educational center, such as Yepes et al. (2007), Navarro (2012), Martínez (2013) and Llamas et al. (2022), among others. In order to obtain a complete view, it is considered those that De Julián (2023) incorporates in his research, encompassing all these perspectives mentioned above (Table 1).

Table 1. Stakeholders of a subsidized educational center.

Internal stakeholders	External stakeholders	
Teachers	Former students and parents	Potential families
Students	Educational environment (other schools, inspection, universities, Ministry of Education, CECE, Catholic Schools)	Other immediate family members (grandparents, uncles, aunts, siblings...) Friends, neighbors.
Management team and heads of studies	Nearby businesses and neighbors	Suppliers and benefactors
Administration and Services Staff (PAS, in Spanish)	Security agents and forces	Media and opinion leaders
Parents/Families AMPAS	NGOs and other associations	Hospitals and health centers, speech therapists.
	Political, social and cultural environment (political parties, trade unions, authorities, local authorities, professional associations, educational, cultural, youth associations).	Religious environment (parishes, bishopric, diocese, CEE).

Source: De Julián (2023).

When referring to a company as being socially responsible, this means a company that addresses all aspects of CSR. In the case of an educational center, these aspects can be linked to human rights, labor standards, environment and the fight against corruption (Martínez, 2014). By cross-referencing these aspects with the aforementioned stakeholders, schools' CSR opportunities can be assessed.

3.3 Corporate Social Responsibility as a communication tool

The concept of CSR, also known as Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), began to emerge in 1999 during the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, as a result of a "Global Compact" between the United Nations and the business sector. The European Union, in its development goals for 2020, stresses the importance of "promoting corporate social responsibility as a key element in gaining the long-term trust of employees and consumers" (European Commission, 2010, p. 18). This same line is continued by the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) approved by the United Nations General Assembly (2015) within the so-called 2030 Agenda.

The European Commission (2001) defines CSR as "the (voluntary) integration, by companies, of social and environmental concerns into their business operations and their relations with their stakeholders" (p. 7). Something that should not be a mere fad but should be part of the *raison d'être* and philosophy of each organization (Viñarás-Abad et al., 2015).

In recent years, a number of professionals in the sector have recognized that communicating the social dimension of a company is crucial for its positive projection, and therefore its management from a communicative approach is essential, since people are increasingly evaluating companies on the basis of their values and behavior towards society (Losada, 2009). However, Villafañe (2004) clarifies this idea by stating that, depending on how an institution perceives CSR, it will or will not contribute to the enhancement of its corporate

reputation. When it is conceived as an effort to maintain high standards of behavior with its stakeholders, it will have a positive impact on reputation. However, if it is seen simply as a philanthropic action, it will not be detrimental, but neither will it provide significant benefits. From this ethical perspective, CSR addresses the problem of what kind of society one wishes to build. In other words, it encompasses all the initiatives undertaken by an organization that aspires to be recognized as responsible and transparent in its management and, in addition, they publish these good practices and produce sustainability reports (Rodríguez-Cala et al., 2017).

Cardona (2016), in turn, argues that CSR is becoming increasingly relevant as a competitive element at a global level and those seeking to implement it must have a clear understanding of its nature and concept. It has become a key factor in business success, linking the ethical commitment of modern companies to society. For this author, there are three main phases in the development of CSR. The first dates back to the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, when, although it did not exist conceptually, activities very similar to those undertaken today were carried out within the framework of social responsibility. The second stage began in the mid-twentieth century, when some organizations began to take into account the surrounding environment, starting to take into account the interests of the public and the environment itself. Finally, the third phase dates from the 1970s to the 2000s, when the response capacity of institutions to the surrounding environment and stakeholders began to increase.

3.4 The evolution of CSR in education

Following a study about the importance of CSR for any organization, the following question comes to mind: is it feasible to apply the business principles of CSR to educational institutions? Various governmental and European guidelines and documents set out the terms under which CSR should be carried out and urge all types of organizations, including educational institutions, to apply these principles. Therefore, schools should not be left behind. Similar to how companies have recognized the need to contribute to the common good through responsible and ethical behavior towards all their publics and society in general, always taking care of nature and the environment, the educational institutions, in general, should not be the exception (Barroso, 2007).

The European Commission itself, in 2011, proposed greater integration of CSR in education:

The development of CSR requires new skills and changes in values and behaviors. Member States can play an important role by encouraging educational institutions to integrate CSR, sustainable development and responsible citizenship into relevant educational programs, in particular in secondary education and university education. European business schools are encouraged to subscribe to the UN Principles for Responsible Management Education. (European Commission, 2011, p. 15)

For this reason, several authors have begun to study CSR in the educational field. Martínez (2013) began to use in several studies the term Educational Social Responsibility (ReSEd in Spanish) understood as "the voluntary disposition of the educational institution that favors the deployment of its members towards others" (Martínez, 2013, p. 72). The same author assures that the CSR of educational organizations is part of their essence. However, the author also stresses that "there are many educational centers that, intentionally, take care of their social responsibility but do not know how to communicate it and, in addition, poor transmission can weaken this feature in the life of the school" (Martínez, 2013, p. 71). A year later, in another study, Martínez (2014) states that CSR should involve all areas of the school's activity, its entire staff and it should be materialized in new services and even with a new educational model.

If CSR is analyzed from the point of view of the educational scenario, it can be seen that it has undergone a strong evolution in recent years, transforming from a traditional and unidirectional communication to a tool that is helping to improve the institutional reputation and the commitment it has acquired with the community.

All this only reflects the social change that the educational system is facing in Europe and of course in Spain, where there is a tendency to carry out more responsible and sustainable practices in line with the demands of its target audience (Pham et al., 2022).

Taking into account the stakeholders of subsidized education centers in Spain, it can be understood why CSR in education is essential. However, only if it goes beyond a makeover, as it should cover environmental sustainability, ethical issues and community participation.

Looking back at the historical basis of CSR in the field of education, it can be seen that, in the mid-20th century, educational institutions began to introduce certain initiatives in order to align themselves with the values that society was demanding. Starting in the 1960s, these initiatives increased, especially in the universities, which were the ones that initiated social change and began to participate in issues such as civil rights and environmental conservation.

In a retrospective of the beginnings of Social Responsibility in the educational sector, it can be seen that in the early days it was focused on performing basic services to the community and charity, while currently the focus is being placed on sustainability and ethical considerations. Furthermore, it is increasingly present in the strategic plans of educational institutions (mainly private ones), as this fosters very positive relations with their community (Martín et al., 2023).

As far as higher education is concerned, CSR has become even more important, as they are including sustainability issues in order to adapt their strategies to obtain a more positive institutional image (Pellicer, 2023).

The impact of CSR on educational institutions is substantial and encompasses improved community relations, greater institutional representation and greater stakeholder involvement. CSR initiatives contribute to a positive institutional image, attracting students, faculty and donors who align with socially responsible values. In addition, active community involvement fosters a sense of social responsibility among students, parents, faculty, and the entire academic community (Tan et al., 2022).

Despite the positive impact, there are challenges. Criticism of superficial engagement has been directed at some institutions that simply adopt CSR as a marketing tool. Achieving a balance between real engagement and strategic communication remains a persistent challenge for educational institutions as they work through the complex CSR landscape. On the other hand, leadership plays a critical role in integrating the success of CSR principles within educational institutions. Leaders who prioritize ethical values and social responsibility set the tone for the entire organization. This commitment will influence the institutional culture, fostering a sense of responsibility that runs through all levels of the educational institution (Arroba-Freire, 2023).

3.5 CSR success cases in educational centers

The implementation of CSR in schools has been favored in recent years by the collaboration of various non-profit organizations, foundations, associations and companies. They offer the possibility of implementing different programs in schools to be carried out with students. Some examples are the following:

- the Abertis Foundation's road safety education programs for all educational stages and even for families, which are raising awareness, among many other issues, of the fact that people should not take the car when they have been drinking alcohol, thus reducing the number of accidents (<https://www.fundacioabertis.org/>).
- La Caixa Social Work, Banco Santander, Red Cross, UNICEF, IBM, Telefónica, etc. are some examples of entities that, free of charge, collaborate with educational centers through workshops, solidarity

projects of different kinds and training, donations, both for students and families as well as for teaching and non-teaching staff.

- Another example is the "Empresas Que Inspiran (Companies That Inspire)" initiative, promoted by more than 30 companies that provide professional guidance through educational volunteering to students in the 4th year of ESO.
- The "Samsung Smart School" initiative, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training and the autonomous communities, promotes the responsible use of technology, provides methodological tools for teachers and favors the fight against cyberbullying.
- The " Taponos para una vida" (bottle caps for a life) solidarity project, in which a Spanish educational group made up of more than 30 schools encourages their students, divided into teams, to recycle their bottle caps throughout the academic year, and the one with the highest number of bottle caps wins a prize.
- The campaigns of the Food Bank and different supermarket chains to collect food at Christmas and other special dates to help the most needy.
- Setting aside spaces in schools to plant organic vegetable gardens and trees.

At the international level, some examples of success include the following: JetBlue's "Soar with Reading" children's reading campaign (Lazovska, 2019.) This program was launched in 2011 and it was designed to encourage children's imagination through reading. The main goal of the program is to get books into the hands of children in need, fostering a love towards reading from an early age. Over the years this initiative has been redesigning its strategies in order to reinforce JetBlue's commitment to community service and its corporate reputation.

In addition to placing book vending machines in all lower-income areas of the United States, it undertook other initiatives, such as launching a public online voting contest which allowed people to choose which city would win 100.000 children's books in 2016. This engaged a large portion of JetBlue's audiences (JetBlue, 2019).

The campaign achieved more than 564 million traditional media printouts and more than 100 million social media posts. The program won praise on social media from education experts, non-profit organizations and members of the media, including former U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Paid support for the campaign resulted in more than 70.500 printouts and nearly 35.000 interactions on social platforms.

As a result of social media support, the program donated more than 30.000 books directly from the vending machines and the rest is being distributed through key partners in the Washington area. Today, they continue their work to encourage reading in the community by expanding book vending machines across the states, with Las Vegas and Newark being the latest states to become part of the program (Soar with Reading, n.d.).

Other companies that have invested in CSR in collaboration with schools and have impacted the reputation of schools include: The Coca-Cola Foundation's "Education for Girls" program that provides scholarships and other support services to girls in developing countries and it has contributed to increasing the number of girls in school and has improved their educational outcomes (The Coca Cola Company, 2013).

On the other hand, there is the Microsoft Corporation's "Partners in Learning" program that provides technology and training to schools in developing countries. It has also helped improve the quality of education in these schools and it has given students access to the latest technology. Since 2003, it has impacted the lives of more than 90 million students, teachers, and policy makers in 101 countries by fostering new approaches to teaching and teacher professional development (Microsoft, 2008).

Finally, the Nike Foundation's Girl Effect program aims to alleviate poverty among girls around the world. The initiative advocates investing in education and sport to help improve the lives of millions of girls by giving them the opportunity to reach their full potential (Spring Impact, n.d.).

4. METHODOLOGY

This study was based on the methodological proposal of Solano-Altaba and Julián (2020) where triangulation is indicated as a good formula for analyzing the different aspects of communication in educational centers.

This research follows the deductive method and consists of two phases: one theoretical and the other empirical. First, initial research was carried out to establish the existing content on the matter being dealt with in this article in order to identify previous works related to CSR in schools and to review the most important aspects of this object of study. Secondly, in order to achieve the objectives of this research, a qualitative technique (the semi-structured interview), a quantitative technique (the survey) and a mixed technique (content analysis) were used. Finally, based on the results obtained, a proposal was made to implement CSR initiatives in schools.

4.1 Sample selection

The universe of the study covers all the subsidized schools located in the 21 districts that make up the territorial area of Madrid which offer all stages of compulsory education, including kindergarten, primary and secondary. Due to the heterogeneity of the population, the choice of the sample is not simple, so the study was based on the work carried out by De Julián (2023) in which different techniques are suggested to be combined. The first step is to apply random stratified probability sampling. To this end, the schools were classified by groups or educational institutions, religious orders, cooperatives, present in the municipality of Madrid, sorting them by number of students, year of existence, presence at national and international and district level. In this case, as indicated by different authors, the elements of the sample are selected by the researcher according to criteria that are considered to be of contribution to the study (Torres et al., 2006). For the last selection, a non-probabilistic convenience sampling was applied.

The final sample is made up of 25 subsidized schools in Madrid (the autonomous community that has made the greatest commitment to subsidized education and in which a large majority of educational institutions are present) and the different types of centers and socioeconomic levels are represented so that the results obtained are conclusive, representative and applicable to all the subsidized schools in the capital.

4.2 Research Techniques

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with the communication managers of the different schools and those of the institutions. In some schools this role exists, while in others the communication work is assumed by the director or a teacher who is freed up for a class hour or so. In any case, the person interviewed was the one who carries out this work. Interviews have also been conducted with the directors of communications for what is known as "la patronal" (private schools), that is, the main non-profit institutions representing subsidized education in Madrid: the Spanish Confederation of Education Centers in Madrid (CECE-Madrid) and Catholic Schools in Madrid (Escuelas Católicas de Madrid). All the interviews were carried out during the months of April and May 2021, the methodological instrument used was the script. All the interviews were recorded and transcribed for subsequent analysis and extraction of results.

The second technique used was the survey addressed to the families, mothers and fathers in the schools under study. The tool used for its application was the questionnaire, which was designed ad hoc and included closed questions, introductory questions, filter questions and control questions, following the methodology proposed by Berganza and Ruiz (2005). Special attention has been paid to the wording of the questions so that they are

clear and concise and use a language accessible to all. In order to evaluate the responses, four different scales were used: the Likert summative scale, the Thurstone differential scale, the Guttman differential scale and the Osgood semantic differential scale. As a final step, the questionnaire was subjected to validation by six experts in corporate communication and specialized in education who evaluated the questions by using a guideline specifically designed for this purpose. Before being sent to parents, a pretest was also carried out to identify and correct possible errors.

In order to obtain the widest possible participation, two mailings were made during the first week of June 2021 and the questionnaire remained open throughout the month. The first one was addressed specifically to the families of the schools that are part of the sample. The second was carried out randomly and indiscriminately and by means of a probabilistic snowball sampling, so that it could be answered by any parent whose children attend a subsidized school in the capital city of Madrid, thus covering the entire study universe.

The third technique applied was content analysis and the object of analysis was the websites of the schools in the sample and their social networks (Instagram, Twitter and Facebook). For its implementation, an analysis sheet was specifically designed for this research to be applied to the social networks and another one for the web pages. They both have their corresponding codebooks. A pretest was also carried out prior to its application to the different media. The content analysis of web pages and social networks was carried out throughout the month of February 2022. It is important to bear in mind that this time period also coincides with the application for vacancies, in the middle of the promotional campaign and the schools' open days. This may influence the results, as it is possible to observe a greater presence of promotional elements, marketing or information aimed at new parents.

5. RESULTS

The most significant findings related to the CSR of the schools included in the sample are presented below and they are derived from each of the methodological techniques used.

5.1 Semi-structured interview

The analysis was carried out using the traditional method, without the use of computer programs, following the recommendations of authors such as McMillan and Schumacher (2005).

All the interviewees agree that their schools carry out CSR activities as an intrinsic part of their DNA, mission and ideals. However, they do not refer to it specifically as CSR, but include it in volunteer activities, environmental care and the promotion of social initiatives. On many occasions it is the teachers themselves who promote CSR on a voluntary basis, and to a lesser extent it is usually promoted by the school management.

Despite these practices, most of them have not considered these initiatives as communication tools. They have not integrated them into their communication plans (if any), nor have they used them strategically, nor is it a priority for them. In some cases, schools do not even communicate these initiatives through their websites or social networks.

Communication managers admit that there is a long way to go in terms of implementing CSR in schools, and that there is great potential for improving corporate image and reputation, as well as for attracting new families and retaining current students.

They also state that the reasons why a family would decide on the school they want for their children are, in order of priority: academic level, location, values and contribution to society, facilities, extra-curricular activities, etc.

Within the scope of CSR, good governance and transparency are also considered. However, many schools still have reservations about being fully transparent. Some educational institutions have established transparency portals, either for legal compliance or in response to past reputational crises, but this information is often incomplete or scattered. In general, schools tend to publish only what is mandatory and do not take advantage of transparency as an effective tool to improve communication and strengthen their reputation.

In terms of employee well-being, a fundamental aspect of CSR, none of the schools implement specific programs for talent retention and employer branding. In fact, most schools are not familiar with these strategies. Only two of the schools under review have expressed that they have in their future plans to improve the care of their employees, especially the teaching staff, through personal and professional development programs that contribute to their professional satisfaction and fulfillment.

5.2 Survey

Statistical analysis of the data was performed by using *Microsoft Excel* as a data manager. In this process, responses were extracted and correlations and cross-analysis of questions were carried out to obtain more detailed information. Initially, 1,300 responses were received, but, after the screening process, 865 final responses were counted coming from 59 different schools in the capital city of Madrid.

Seventy-two percent of the respondents were mothers, while 28% were fathers. In terms of family composition, most of the participating families are large: 7 children 25%, 6 children 21%, 5 children 18%, 4 children 14%, 3 children 11% and, to a lesser extent, families with 1 or 2 children. This data suggests that respondents have children in all educational stages of the school, giving them a more complete picture of communication in the school as a whole. In terms of educational stages, more responses were obtained from the primary stage, followed by infant and secondary.

When parents were asked how much they agreed with the statement "my school takes care of the environment", half of the respondents gave it the highest score, 33% rated it a "4", 15% gave it an intermediate score and only 2% gave it a very low score.

Regarding the statement "my school takes care of its employees", the percentage of those who gave it a score of "5" is lower, at 44%. Thirty-six percent of respondents gave a score of "4" and 4% believed that their school does not take care of its employees at all.

Regarding the statement "my school collaborates to improve society", 56% of the respondents indicated that it always does, 31% responded almost always, 10% said sometimes and only 3% expressed that it does not do so at all.

Regarding transparency in communication, 46% of respondents perceive their school to be transparent, 31% gave it a rating of "4", 15% consider it to be sometimes transparent, and 8% stated that their school lacks transparency in its communication. When the results of the transparency assessment are examined together with those of the overall rating of communication at their children's school, a direct relationship is revealed. Those who rate the school's communication as very good also claim that their school is transparent. On the other hand, those who give a low rating to communication claim that there is a lack of transparency.

5.3 Content analysis

In order to extract the results, the analysis sheets have been converted into a Google Forms form. Specific tables and graphs have been created for each question for its analysis, which facilitates the categorization and interpretation of the information in a clearer and more visual way.

It is important to note that, for the analysis of the web page, two levels of detail have been distinguished: the first level (everything that can be found on the home page and is quickly and easily accessible), and the second (information that the user can only obtain by entering the different sections of the website).

In the case of the analysis of social networks, it was carried out by examining the Twitter, Facebook and Instagram accounts of each school (not all the centers have all three). An analysis sheet was not applied for each social network, but a single consolidated sheet per school that synthesizes the information from all its social networks.

The analysis sheets consider each of the aspects of CSR separately: care for teachers, care for the environment and care for society (volunteering).

Firstly, it was observed that 43,3% of the web pages examined reflect in some way the work of their teachers and give them a space or importance within the site. The most common way of addressing this issue is to provide data related to the number of workers, the teaching staff, the organizational structure of the center and, in a less frequent case (present in only one school). This is done through news highlighting the activities and achievements of the teachers.

With regard to the existence of an intranet or employee portal, only less than half of the schools have this tool.

Sixty percent of the websites evaluated include sections related to CSR, either at the first or second level of the structure. In contrast, 40% do not include content related to this aspect of communication. On the other hand, only two websites in the sample have a portal or section dedicated to transparency. One of them is located in the first level, while the other is in the second level.

Regarding whether social networks reflect the work of teachers, half of the schools do and half do not. Regarding the dissemination of messages related to CSR, volunteering, acts of solidarity, care for teachers, etc., 78% of the platforms do so regularly, but there is no perceived planning or strategy in these publications. Instead, they use the publications as a bulletin board. Moreover, the frequency is intermittent. There may be three CSR publications on the same day and none in the following weeks. There is also no perceived strategy in the way the message is written, nor is interaction called for.

6. PROPOSAL

Given these results, the review of previous studies and other scientific research, the following proposal is made.

Subsidized schools that do not use CSR strategically are missing out on the great benefits that this tool can offer them. Firstly, in order to differentiate themselves from other schools that offer the same services as they do. Parents not only demand that their children's school should have academic standards, but also that it should teach them values and that these values should be lived and promoted in the center itself. They also lose the possibility of being more visible and making agreements with companies, institutions, foundations, etc. On the other hand, the lack of communication of CSR activities, in a society where CSR is increasingly valued and promoted by public authorities and legislation, could negatively affect the school's reputation by transmitting a lack of commitment.

Another aspect that could be affected by the absence of CSR is the attraction and retention of human talent, both at the level of teachers, families as well as students. Talented people also tend to look for places where their personal and professional development will benefit society as a whole. Communication in general can also be weakened as CSR activities can help build and strengthen relationships, not only internally, but also with the local community, local organizations, parents and other stakeholders.

In terms of differentiation, having the students of a school that encourages and promotes CSR participate in these projects and be trained to be socially responsible at all levels, provides them with practical experience and helps them develop skills such as leadership, teamwork and empathy, preparing them to face the challenges of the real world. It is especially important for an educational center to teach its students and their families to make a responsible use of technology. Given the great social debate that this issue has been generating in recent years, the CSR that the school focuses on in this regard and that is effectively communicated can be an important differentiating element.

All stakeholders, both internal and external, as well as society in general and the environment, can benefit from the CSR policies of a school which, in the end, is a matter of values. These values will be learned year by year by the students and will influence the entire educational community. Taking the above-mentioned stakeholders as a reference, the following initiatives are proposed. Each center can apply the ones that are more aligned with its educational project. This list is intended to be a starting point and an initial idea to stimulate other initiatives to implement CSR in all subsidized schools.

- Volunteer initiatives with different NGOs, associations, nursing homes, children's homes, special education schools, orphanages, assistance centers of all kinds, etc.
- Solidarity races.
- Collection of solidarity caps to donate the money to different aid associations while promoting recycling.
- Collaboration with different humanitarian projects.
- Provide training to students and families to raise awareness and prevent bullying and cyberbullying.
- Environmental projects carried out by students across the whole school, or by subjects, stages or levels.
- Cultural outings related to sustainability and the environment. Collaboration with local cultural institutions to promote access to culture and the arts among students (visits to museums, concerts, plays, exhibitions...).
- Participation in social or sustainability-related contests.
- Applying employer branding strategies to retain talent and take care, beyond the legal aspects, of the teaching staff and other internal personnel of a school. Extra benefits for employees and their families.
- Personal growth, mentoring, coaching and training programs for teachers.
- Facilitating and organizing regular training for the families of school students on all kinds of topics related to the different areas covered by CSR. Planning thematic conferences: technology-free day, responsible use of technology, volunteering week, environmental competitions, etc.
- Offer low-cost resources to families and teachers so that they can seek help if they need it in the areas of mental health, conflict resolution, family counseling courses, etc.
- Train and encourage the responsible use of technology among students and their families, offer parental control services. Train on the prevention of computer crimes and scams.
- Real personalized attention to students and their families.
- Implement internal policies of good governance and transparency.
- Inclusion and diversity: Promoting activities that favor the prevention of bullying, gender equality and improving the inclusion of students with special educational needs.
- Promotion of youth entrepreneurship: Promote programs that foster the entrepreneurial spirit of students and provide them with tools and resources to develop their business projects.

For all these measures to be effective and to be implemented strategically, they must be contemplated and programmed in the annual communication plan. In addition, they should be communicated through the different channels of the educational center, adapting the messages to each of them. In addition, the

preparation of an annual social balance sheet as a memory is recommended as the final element of communication, to record everything that has been done and to help generate a better image and reputation.

For all the initiatives implemented to have a real and effective impact on society and the rest of the public, the entire educational community must be involved and should not be a mere facade, but should become a cornerstone and a natural way of being within the corporate culture of the educational center.

All these proposed measures are intended to improve the comprehensive education of students and to ensure that they and their families are the main beneficiaries of all CSR initiatives carried out by the school. They also contribute to improving society and the environment.

Thanks to CSR, students receive a more complete and comprehensive education, which prepares them to live in society, to go beyond themselves and put their qualities at the service of others and the world around them, developing their critical spirit and social awareness. This goes beyond academics and it constitutes a differentiating element for the school. It can be used at a communicative and strategic level to attract students and families interested in having their children receive this type of values within the educational center.

7. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

After studying the theoretical framework and analyzing the data obtained in the empirical research, the following conclusions have been drawn:

- 1) Using CSR in a strategic and planned way is a good tool for improving the reputation of subsidized schools, making them stand out from the competition, retaining talent and attracting new families and students.
- 2) Subsidized schools carry out CSR initiatives because it is part of their DNA; however, they do not communicate it in a strategic and planned way, nor do they consider it as a communication tool. Due to this particularity, subsidized schools are an important social agent for improving the care of the environment, favoring social development, promoting good governance, transparency and the care of workers, as well as improving coexistence.
- 3) There is a lack of training for management teams in communication and CSR. Moreover, its improvement is not a priority for schools and no resources are allocated to it. However, its importance is being recognized, as well as the benefits that could be obtained and the potential for improvement that exists.
- 4) The CSR initiatives that are published on social networks tend to be mostly related to volunteering or activities to care for the environment and sustainability. They are not transmitted in a strategic and planned way. The work of the teaching staff, their profile, training, and all the initiatives they carry out daily with their students are not recognized or promoted. They do not carry out talent retention initiatives, nor do they promote the creation of an employer brand, nor do they usually have employee-accessible portals on their websites.
- 5) In order for CSR to be sincere and effective, and to fulfill its ethical task of helping to improve society, it must involve the entire educational center, all its members and audiences, and must be part of its corporate culture, mission, vision, values and purpose.
- 6) European and Spanish institutions are promoting, through various regulations, recommendations, forums, etc., the implementation of CSR in all organizations. This drive is a good opportunity for the implementation of CSR initiatives in the education sector and, more specifically, in subsidized schools.
- 7) Research has begun to use the term Social Responsibility in Education (ReSEd) to refer to all intentional CSR initiatives on the part of schools.
- 8) CSR is a differentiating element for schools as it is one of the main reasons why a family chooses the school for their children. For CSR to be known and really differentiate the school from other schools, it

must be well communicated and become part of its philosophy and corporate culture, so that it is really perceived and followed by parents.

The conclusions obtained leave open different lines of research to further explore the importance and the need for strategic communication within the management of private educational centers supported by public funds. Despite the fact that the directors themselves recognize the importance and the need to include CSR in their communication plans, they do not invest money in it.

In a context where competition and demographic challenges are becoming ever more evident, CSR can not only help to differentiate schools in a saturated market, but can also be a determining factor when it comes to attracting and retaining talent and new families and students. Every year, subsidized schools already carry out a large number of activities that could be classified as CSR as part of their educational mission and as a result of the application of the values upheld by their educational project. However, the communication of these initiatives is not always carried out in a strategic and planned manner. This lack of focus can significantly limit the positive impact that these initiatives could have both inside and outside the school community.

On the other hand, CSR efforts which are communicated through channels such as social networks tend to focus on specific aspects, such as volunteering and environmental sustainability, while other equally important areas, such as acknowledging the teaching staff and their daily contributions, may go unnoticed. This fact is confirmed by the answers given by the families to the questionnaire. They have a good perception of the social and environmental initiatives taken by their schools, but they perceive significant areas for improvement regarding the promotion, recognition and care of the teaching staff.

For all these reasons, schools should invest economic and human resources to carry out CSR and corporate communication that is effective, genuine and lasting over time, involving the entire educational community and helping them to differentiate themselves, be sustainable and ensure their continuity.

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Conceptualization: Solano Santos, Luis Felipe. **Software:** Martín Critikián, Davinia and De Julián Latorre, Patricia. **Validation:** Solano Santos, Luis Felipe. **Formal analysis:** Martín Critikián, Davinia. **Data curation:** De Julián Latorre, Patricia. **Drafting-Preparation of the original draft:** Martín Critikián, Davinia and De Julián Latorre. **Drafting-Revision and Editing:** Solano Santos, Luis Felipe. **Visualization:** Martín Critikián, Davinia. **Supervision:** Solano Santos, Luis Felipe. **All authors have read and accepted the published version of the manuscript:** Solano Santos, Luis Felipe, Martín Critikián, Davinia and De Julián Latorre, Patricia.

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AUTHORS:

Luis Felipe Solano Santos

Complutense University of Madrid

PhD in Communication from the Complutense University of Madrid. Full Professor of the Department of Communication Theories and Analysis of the School of Information Sciences at the Complutense University of Madrid where he teaches since 2001 and where he has held the position of Academic Secretary, between June 2016 and October 2023, and has been the Principal from November 2023 to the date. Director of the Museum I+D+C Group Laboratory of Digital Culture and Hypermedia Museography since June 2021. His lines of research focus on the foundations of corporate social responsibility, as well as the reputation in the field of public relations.

fsolano@ucm.es

Índice H: 8

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5620-9546>

Scopus ID: <https://www.scopus.com/authid/detail.uri?authorId=51664252900>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.com/citations?user=VYrQy7kAAAAJ>

Patricia de Julián Latorre

International University of La Rioja (UNIR)

PhD in Social Communication from the CEU San Pablo University of Madrid and triple degree in Journalism, Audiovisual Communication and Advertising and Public Relations from the European University of Madrid. She has worked as a journalist both in the media (TV and written) and in communication departments. She currently teaches online at the International University of La Rioja (UNIR) and face-to-face, as an external collaborator at the King Juan Carlos University in Madrid. She is also a teacher of Secondary and Senior High School at the Arenales Carabanchel School in Madrid. Her line of research focuses on corporate communication and public relations, especially within the educational sector.

patricia.dejulian@unir.net

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0000-6222-2635>

Google Scholar: <https://scholar.google.es/citations?user=1ZSyl-EAAAAJ&hl=es>

Academia.edu: <https://universidadinternacionaldelarioja.academia.edu/PatriciadeJuli%C3%A1nLatorre>

Dialnet: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/autor?codigo=5373072>

Davinia Martín Critikián

CEU San Pablo University. Spain.

PhD in Communication from the Camilo José Cela University. From 2017 to 2022 she has been working at CEU San Pablo University combining teaching with management and research. She is currently living in Indonesia doing a research stay. Her lines of research are: communication trends, consumer behavior and social media. Prior to her teaching experience at CEU San Pablo University, she worked at the International University of La Rioja, developing unpublished syllabi and teaching online.

davinia.martincritikian@ceu.es

Orcid ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6921-4707>

Google Scholar: https://scholar.google.es/citations?hl=es&user=B_MOIL8AAAAJ

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