

The Identity of University Social Responsibility on the Websites of the Universities of the Autonomous Region of Madrid (Spain) and the State of Puebla (Mexico), As a Tool of Grassroots Public Diplomacy

Abstract

The identity of the universities is one more piece to consider inside the puzzle of the grassroots public diplomacy. University social responsibility is not well exploited on university websites. This is the main conclusion we have reached following a comparative study of the websites of the universities of the Autonomous Region of Madrid (Spain) and those of the universities of the State of Puebla, including public, private, and Catholic Church institutions. All the universities of the Madrid región and 92.5% of those consulted in the State of Puebla have a website, but none of them gives an explicit reference on its homepage that operations are performed within all occupational aspects in accordance with the realm of university social responsibility.

It would therefore be fair to say that there is no evidence of optimal exploitation of university social responsibility on the websites. When this must be considered as one element that it is necessary to include in the communicative frame of reference to obtain mutual understanding, stable, and beneficial relations for all the parts.

Keywords

grassroots public diplomacy, university social responsibility, Comunidad de Madrid, Estado de Puebla, communication, public relations, reputation, public image

From a Theoretical Focus

From a constructivist point of view, public diplomacy is based (Sevin, 2015) on an assumption that norms, values, and identities in international relations are not defined by material power sources—such as military power or economic infrastructure—but are social constructs. Sevin (2015) recognizes that public diplomacy, albeit its functional similarities with public relations and other corporate communication tools, is inherently a foreign policy tool, used by practitioner states to advance their national interests and achieve their foreign policy goals. Then, the universities of any country can be observed as one tool of the relationship and of the generation of values among the countries, the organizations and the countries, and the countries and their strategic publics. This generation of values can be a frame of reference to the grassroot public diplomacy and be able like that to create and support stable and lasting relations with the target publics. In this way, how there is in use the university social responsibility (USR), it can give tracks on the behavior of the universities and the

opportunities to generate networks with target publics. We can observe the results of the grassroots public diplomacy in the educational sector with the experiences realized by Gregory Payne and HRH Prince Faisal F. Al Saud (Hayden, 2009) for Saudi American Exchange, and by Gregory Payne, Efe Sevin, and Sara Bruya (2011) for the town of Rosarito Beach in Baja, Mexico. I assume, as Goffman (1974) says, that *definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principals of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify.* (pp. 10-11)

The identity of the universities is one more piece to consider inside the puzzle of the public diplomacy. And the public diplomacy is one more argument from where offering efforts of building relationships.

I agree with the approach of Gregory Payne (2009, p. 46) when says “the new public diplomacy, therefore, can be defined as international relationship-building, sometimes for the purpose of asserting national images or policies,” but alternatively as “an end in itself that contributes to a better international environment” (Zaharna, 2009, p. 91). According to theoretical focus, the beginning could be the idea that the impact of universities in any country on society would seem clear from the education and research perspectives, and in terms of the progress created in the generation of knowledge and technology. However, university organizations offer much more. As open organizations, their interaction with society serves to project the image of their organizational culture, and specifically their means of communicating with all audiences in general, and in particular with their strategic audiences. In order to mapping out a spectrum of public diplomacy initiatives, Zaharna (2009) comments that parallel to the information framework of public diplomacy is the relational framework. Relational framework is rooted in the view of communication that favors the notion of “fellowship” in ritual communication, the high-context focus away from messages and the collectivist/interdependent concern for social cohesion and harmony. Relationships are the pivotal feature in the relational framework, and public diplomacy initiatives focus on identifying and building relationships.

We have for some years supported a position whereby the pursuit of excellence at any organization provides a fulcrum based on the concept of relationship as the core of management and communicational activity in relations. Management and communicational activity will take the form of the planning and administration of strategic relational campaigns and programs (based on scientific theories and research derived from the body of knowledge in the area), which will help create, maintain, or modify a stable relationship between an individual or a legal entity and the corresponding audiences. The social responsibility of organizations is a very significant factor in creating, maintaining, or modifying stable relationships with strategic audiences.

Public diplomacy, despite a lack of agreement on its definition, is usually seen as a fundamental communication and public relations activity carried out by states

(Fitzpatrick, Fullerton, & Kendrick, 2013).

Thus, public relations and their well-established connection with social responsibility, could serve as the channel generating the ideal and desired transformation at universities in both Spain and Mexico. It should be recalled that Larissa A. Grunig, James E. Grunig, and David M. Dozier (2002) speak, in their work "Excellent Public Relations and Effective Organizations: A Study of Communication Management in Three Countries," of four levels of communication by organizations of any kind: program level, functional level, organizational level, and social level. The management of organizations typically has repercussions beyond their own purposes. Organizations generally affect other organizations, individuals, and audiences within society. As a result, organizations cannot claim to be effective unless they are socially responsible. We therefore hold that public relations are of great value when they contribute to the creation or maintenance of the elements of social responsibility of organizations. Universities cannot remain apart from such circumstances, but must instead lead the transformation of society through their exemplary and effective communication and management.

Universities, as with all other organizations in any country, would seem to find themselves in a far from attractive state of limbo in terms of their management and image interests with regard to social responsibility. We refer here, of course, to a regulatory limbo. Isabel María Ruiz Mora and María del Mar Soria Ibáñez in a study performed in 2009, and titled "Responsabilidad Social de la Universidades en España," calls for a balance between discourse and action by universities, effective engagement in sustainable development, in responsible management, in integration with society, in respect for human rights, and in equal opportunities, subjecting themselves to controls and regulations to guarantee proper behavior within the society of which they form a part. So, Roumen Dimitrov (2015) comment that if you want visibility, then publics will take stock of you not only when you (sometimes) speak but also when you remain silent (most of the time).

My starting point is the circumstance that one should not view social responsibility as being equivalent only to philanthropy, in other words, with purposes, circumstances, and so on, that are similar. I agree with Professor at Basque Country Santiago Pozas (2004), who teaches at the Universidad del País Vasco, in indicating that the most appropriate approach to the relationship between philanthropy and social responsibility lies in the proposal by Carroll and Buchholz (1999), modelling a concept of corporate social responsibility comprising four layers arranged as a pyramid: economic responsibilities (the base of the pyramid, and hence, the main factors to be taken into consideration at any given time); legal responsibilities (compliance with the law: the law is a social code of right and wrong); ethical responsibilities (obligation to do what is right, fair, and good; avoidance of harm); and philanthropic responsibilities (contributing to improvements in the life of the community by providing resources). Corporate social responsibility would therefore be the result of taking on board economic, legal, ethical, and also philanthropic responsibilities. All four at once, without

excluding any of them.

My belief is that this model could easily be transferred to the university field in any country of the world. Universities should be able to manage and communicate their effective and sustainable economy; ensure they guarantee the laws structuring their daily work (employment, administration, students', citizens', educational and research rights, international relations, etc.); support ethical behavior in accordance with the cultural values and principles of the population, and their philanthropic responsibilities toward society. The researcher Cecilia Muñoz Cancela (2012), of the Instituto Universitario de Desarrollo y Cooperación at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, comments that USR involves reflection and intervention as to psychological, social, political, and environmental implications generated explicitly or implicitly in university practices, by both action and omission. The same Universidad Complutense de Madrid researcher acknowledges that as an educational community, we as university members have both rights (as human beings) and responsibilities (as a civil society potentially affecting the social context), and also obligations (as civil servants or members of key institutions), with regard to the legitimation or modification of the "rules of play" implicit in the fabric of power. We have an even greater importance, however, since although there are national or international legal guarantees for human rights, their implementation in the real world directly depends on the capabilities available to citizens and the information available, in other words, educational and communicational processes are at the epicenter.

And so, in evaluating the explicit presence of social responsibility on the website of the universities studied, we did so in accordance with the following analytical elements:

1. University Governance:

- Organizational mission, vision, and values.
- Autonomy and quality as guiding principles.
- Transparency and accountability.
- Institutional reputation.
- Awards and recognitions.
- National and international rankings.
- Conacyt.

7. Responsibility toward students:

- Equal opportunity access.
- Student support.
- Bursary program.
- Comprehensive health program.
- Reduction in fees.

8. Responsibility toward employees:

- Commitment to equal opportunities.
- Training programs.

- Social and health benefits.
 - Occupational risk prevention and safety.
 - Recognition of workers with disabilities.
 - Work–life balance.
 - Salary and human resources policies.
4. Responsibility toward the University community:
- Commitment to research and teaching.
 - Commitment to internationalization.
 - Academic offering, quality of teaching and new study courses.
 - Mobility.
 - University safety and support.
 - Improvements to facilities and infrastructure.
 - Respect for rights and diversity.
5. Responsibility toward society:
- Social engagement projects.
 - Commitment to literacy.
 - Social and economic impact of research projects.
 - Commitment to culture.
 - Commitment to sport.
 - Commitment to social integration, development, and solidarity.
6. Responsibility in protection for and respect of the environment:
- Commitment to sustainability.
 - Environmental indicators.
 - Reduction of environmental impact and saving of resources.
7. Responsibility toward the surrounding context:
- Suppliers.
 - Transparency and objectivity in procurement.
 - Greater opportunities and advantages for all.
 - Commitment to mutual benefits.
 - Public Authorities, Institutions, and Political Parties.
 - Commitment to collaboration.
 - Fostering of democratic values.
 - Commitment to private enterprise.
 - Competitiveness, productivity and technological innovation.
 - Media.
 - Alumni.

Baseline Hypotheses

The universities may address USR in their operational bylaws, or even perform this function by means of a planned implementation and development process. However, there is no good communicative exploitation of this on their websites.

Methodology

An analysis was performed on the content of 15 universities in the Autonomous Region of Madrid (Spain) and 53 universities in the State of Puebla (Mexico). The content analysis was focused as a quantitative technique entailing the systematic application of previously established rules, serving to measure the frequency with which certain elements of interest appear within an overall volume of information selected by us to study some of the aspects that strike us as useful in accordance with the purposes of our research.

The technique employed to perform a comprehensive analysis of the website is content analysis, based on the belief that this will provide measurable and analizable results, as we are here discussing an essentially quantitative method.

The “preset” rules are the following variables: existence or absence of a website; explicit reference on the homepage to the expression USR; explicit reference on the homepage to elements such as governance, responsibility toward students, responsibility toward employees, responsibility toward the university community, responsibility toward society, responsibility toward the environment, responsibility toward the surrounding context; and reference on inner pages to the aforementioned elements.

But, can be interesting to understand all of these within a demographic context and the offer of higher education in each country and in each specific geographic area.

In this way, The Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport (2013) indicates that the Spanish University System comprised in the 2013-2014 academic year a total of 82 universities (with 80 providing teaching), distributed across 236 campuses for those operating in-person, and 112 sites for remote and special facilities.

Of the 82 universities, 50 are publicly owned and 32 privately. The number of private universities has increased considerably over recent years, and in specific terms 14 private universities have been founded since 2001, in other words practically 1 university per year. In turn, 15 of all Spanish universities are in the Autonomous Region of Madrid (Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sport, 2013), with a total of 22,725 teaching and research staff and 11,368 administrative and service employees. The total population of the Autonomous Region of Madrid is 6,454,440, 48% of the population being male and 52% female.

As for Puebla, the higher educational offering is one of the main reasons why an increasing number of young people from both the South and North of the Mexican Republic see Puebla as a study option.

Puebla thus has the second highest number of colleges, behind only the Federal District, with a total of 454 institutions.

Consideration should also be given to the demographic details of Puebla. Puebla, with more than 5 million inhabitants, is the fifth most populated federative entity of the Mexican Republic, after the State of Mexico, the Federal District, Veracruz, and Jalisco. The municipality of Puebla is home to around a fifth of the population, although the metropolitan area contains around a third of all inhabitants. According to INEGI data, in 2010, the population of the State of Puebla comprised more than 3 million women (3,009,974) and almost 2.8 million men (2,769,855), in other words a total of almost 5.8 million inhabitants (5,779,829).

Puebla therefore proves to have a highly concentrated offering with regard to its population, compared with the Madrid Region.

Conclusions

The identity of the universities is one more piece to consider inside the puzzle of the grassroots public diplomacy. The review brings over of the websites and their link with USR offer us a picture about how the online identity of the universities of Autonomous Region of Madrid (Spain) is and the State of Puebla (Mexico), and to conclude how the university behavior and their communication in order to connect both with de expectations of the public opinion is.

Between the State of Puebla and the Autonomous Region of Madrid, there is a difference in population of 674,611 in favor of Madrid. However, there is a huge disproportion in the number of higher education institutions between Puebla and Madrid: 15 universities in the Madrid Region and 426 higher education colleges in the State of Puebla.

Of the 15 universities operating in the Autonomous Region of Madrid (6 private, 8 public, and 1 Catholic Church), all of them have an online presence in the form of websites, but none makes explicit reference on its homepage to the fact that they operate within the educational sector in Spain in accordance with parameters of USR on a comprehensive basis, in other words in all the sections defined above, or at least most of them. None of the websites in the Madrid region is enabled for use by the visually impaired.

Meanwhile, of the 53 universities analyzed in the State of Puebla (29 public and 24 private in all), 4 of them (15%) have no online presence by means of a website (it is noteworthy that all four are publicly owned). Similarly, none of the universities consulted makes explicit reference on its homepage that it is delivering higher education in all employment aspects in accordance with the terms of USR. There is no comprehensive approach to the communicative promotion of USR. Just one organization, the Universidad de las Américas, has a website which provides access for the visually impaired.

The Universidad Complutense de Madrid and the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla are the two universities with the greatest and most effective treatment of USR in their websites. The development of strategies of collaboration

and networking are typical actions of grassroots public diplomacy that can lead to a major understanding between the governments and target publics of this countries.

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