



# Online Reputation Management in Spanish Public Hospitals. A Quantitative Analysis

**Pablo Medina Aguerrebere**  
Canadian University Dubai (United Arab Emirates)  
pablo.medina@tud.ac.ae  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4463-4721>

**Eva Medina**  
University of Alicante (Spain)  
ec90@alu.ua.es  
Orcid: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6276-4127>



**Toni González Pacanowski**  
University of Alicante (Spain)  
toni.gonzalez@ua.es  
Orcid: <http://orcid.org/0000-0003-3005-2218>



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Videopresentación

## ABSTRACT

Spanish public hospitals face an increasingly complicated situation because of limited budgets, patients' new requirements and the development of private hospital groups. To deal with this challenging framework and reinforce their strategic positionings in the health market, some public hospitals have implemented corporate communication strategies based on social media platforms. This paper aims to analyze how Spanish public hospitals manage *Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Youtube*, as well as their corporate websites, to promote their brands and reinforce their strategic positionings. To do that, we conducted a literature review about health communication, and then we resorted to

48 indicators to analyze how the 100 best Spanish public hospitals used their websites and these three social media platforms for branding purposes. We concluded that most public hospitals in this country resorted to their corporate websites to disseminate journalistic content; they used *Facebook* and *Twitter* to publish visual information about the hospital (logo, videos, etc.); and they managed *Youtube* to describe medical treatments and internal protocols.

**Keywords:** spanish public hospital; corporate communication; brand; reputation; social media

## RESUMEN

*Los hospitales públicos españoles hacen frente a una situación cada vez más complicada debido a los presupuestos limitados, las nuevas exigencias de los pacientes y la expansión de los grupos hospitalarios privados. Para hacer frente a este desafío y reforzar sus posicionamientos estratégicos en el mercado sanitario, algunos hospitales públicos han implementado estrategias de comunicación corporativa basadas en el uso de las redes sociales. Este artículo tiene como objetivo analizar cómo los hospitales públicos españoles utilizan Facebook, Twitter, Youtube así como sus webs corporativas para promocionar sus marcas y reforzar sus posicionamientos estratégicos. Para ello, llevamos a cabo una revisión de la literatura sobre comunicación de salud, y a continuación recurrimos a 48 indicadores para*

*analizar cómo los 100 mejores hospitales públicos españoles utilizaban sus sitios web y las tres redes sociales citadas para promocionar sus marcas. Concluimos que la mayoría de los hospitales públicos recurrían a sus sitios web corporativos para difundir contenidos periodísticos; utilizaban Facebook y Twitter para publicar información visual sobre el hospital (logotipo, videos, etc.); y recurrían a Youtube para describir tratamientos médicos y protocolos internos.*

**Palabras clave:** hospitales públicos españoles; comunicación corporativa; marca; reputación; redes sociales

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The professional management of corporate communication constitutes a true challenge for Spanish public hospitals: lack of experience, limited budgets, constantly changing market, etc. Nevertheless, it also represents an opportunity to build a strong brand in a collective way along with their stakeholders: employees, patients, suppliers, public authorities, and media companies. That is why many Spanish public hospitals have resorted to social media platforms as a corporate communication tool: thanks to these platforms, they dynamize their branding initiatives and reinforce their strategic positionings in the health market. Even if using these platforms involves several risks related to patients' privacy, health professionals' participation, and hospitals' brand reputation, social media contribute to improve hospitals' corporate communication strategies. Thanks to these platforms, hospitals can focus their communication initiatives on creative techniques such as branded content, online communities, or health education. This paper aims to analyze how Spanish public hospitals managed their corporate websites as well as social media platforms to promote their brands. In other words, we try to answer the question: Which branding initiatives do Spanish public hospitals implement on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Youtube* and on their corporate website to reinforce their brand reputation? To do that, we conducted a literature review about social media as a corporate communication tool, patients' and doctors' involvement in this area, and the impact of these platforms on hospitals' communication strategies. Then, we analyzed how the 100 best Spanish public hospitals managed their social media platforms (*Facebook*, *Twitter*, and *Youtube*) as well as their corporate websites to promote their brands. Finally, we propose three conclusions as well as three managerial implications that will allow these organizations to improve their efficiency when implementing branding initiatives based on social media.

## 2. HOSPITALS' REPUTATION MANAGEMENT THROUGH SOCIAL MEDIA

Social media platforms have revolutionized hospitals' corporate communication strategies by al-

lowing these organizations to engage with patients in a more efficient way, collect data and develop supportive networks (Prochaska et al, 2017). According to Taken (2017), in the United States 95% of hospitals managed social media as a corporate communication tool. Some hospitals, such as *Mayo Clinic*, also use these platforms to reinforce their internal protocols: relationships with patients, research projects protocols, health professionals' evaluation, and health education initiatives (Kotsenas et al., 2018). From a scientific perspective, using social media represents a public health constraint: information accuracy, interactions with different patients, etc. (Costa-Sánchez & Míguez-González, 2018). Nevertheless, from a branding standpoint, these platforms allow hospitals to improve patients' experiences: social groups, conversations with doctors, health education initiatives, etc. (Falisi et al., 2017). Many private and public hospitals use these platforms to implement health communities where patients and doctors share medical experiences and knowledge (De Las Heras-Pedrosa et al., 2020). These communities positively impact on hospitals' reputation and patients' perceptions about the organization (Kotsenas et al., 2018).

In this framework, health professionals are becoming brand ambassadors (Medina Aguerrebere, 2019). Some hospitals propose workshops and other learning initiatives to train doctors on how to use these platforms when interacting with patients (Salmon & Bridget, 2017). In some medical schools, students can enroll in courses focused on interpersonal communication skills when using social media (Epstein et al., 2017) as well as other domains such as how to communicate bad news, or how to adapt to different kinds of patients: elderly people, children, aggressive patients, etc. (Moore et al., 2018). These initiatives are based on a main idea scientifically proved by many authors: when health professionals communicate efficiently, they provide patients with a better medical service (Brown, 2008). That is why, more and more hospitals implement combined learning initiatives including to help doctors and patients improve their skills in interpersonal communication (Epstein et al., 2017). Indeed, once both enhance their communication skills, they can implement a true dialogue on social media based on mutual respect and empathy (Brand et al., 2017). Moreover, thanks to these skills, they can also implement collective decision-mak-

ing processes, which positively impacts on patients' perceptions about the hospital (Peterson et al., 2016).

Health professionals play a key role in health communication; however, the main protagonist remains the patient. Most of them use social media as a source of information about treatments or diseases (McCarroll et al., 2014). Nevertheless, more and more patients also resort to social media to develop a supportive network allowing them to interact with patients facing similar problems (Myrick et al., 2016). Thanks to social media, patients establish a more symmetric conversation with health professionals (Smailhodzic et al., 2016). These new relationships determine patients' behaviors and attitudes (Namkoong et al., 2017). That is why more and more hospitals recruit social media managers whose main responsibility consists of redesigning the hospital's social media presence and establish a true dialogue with patients (Visser et al., 2016). Communicating efficiently with doctors through social media allows patients to improve their interpersonal communication skills when they meet doctors in the hospital (Jiang & Street, 2016). Moreover, social media directly influence patients' adherence to medical treatments (Badr, 2017).

According to different authors, such as Johnson (2014), there is a direct relationship between patients' experiences with health professionals through social media and the hospital's reputation. Building a reputed brand constitutes a priority for hospitals: to do that, public hospitals associate their image with the principles followed by public administration, while private hospitals try to create a unique brand (Ruiz Granja, 2015). Nevertheless, both of them always prioritize the same value: patients' trust (Kemp et al., 2014). This value is essential to build a reputed brand that helps the hospital to survive in a constantly changing context (Mira et al., 2014). To do that, many hospitals focus on two social media platforms: *Twitter* and *Facebook* (Triemstra et al., 2018). Hospitals use *Twitter* to disseminate corporate information about health-related topics (research, treatments, trends) and in this way establish a dialogue with stakeholders (Park et al., 2016). Concerning *Facebook*, many hospitals manage this platform to implement health education campaigns whose

main objective is to change people's behaviors and reinforce the hospital's brand (Glover et al., 2015). Besides these two platforms, hospitals also use other social media platforms, such as *Instagram* or *Youtube*, which are especially useful to better understand patients' perceptions about the hospital, its services, and its employees (Balasooriya-Smeekens et al., 2015).

In Spain, 87% of people aged 16-65 years use social media platforms, which represents more than 25 million people (IAB, 2019). According to the same source, this percentage increases when it comes to women (89%) or people aged 16-24 years (93%). The main social media platforms Spanish citizens use are *WhatsApp* and *Facebook*: on average, they spend 105 minutes per day on *WhatsApp*, and 67 minutes every day on *Facebook* (Statistica, 2020). Concerning health organizations, 81,6% of health professionals manage social media to communicate with patients and doctors: the main platforms managed by health professionals are *Facebook* (53,7%), *Instagram* (30,3%), *Twitter* (25,3%) and *LinkedIn* (18,3%) (Consejo General de Colegios Oficiales de Médicos, Confederación Estatal de Sindicatos Médicos, 2020). Many health professionals and patients also use "*Conectando Pacientes*", a social media platform specialized in health-related issues.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, some hospitals and schools of medicine in Spain propose workshops to help doctors and future doctors to understand how to use social media in a professional and respectful way (Aroca & López, 2017). In this country, social media have become a public health tool that improve patients' experiences and hospitals' reputation (Matarín Jiménez, 2015).

### 3. METHODOLOGY

In order to analyze how Spanish public hospitals promote their brands through social media platforms and their corporate websites, we focused on the *Merco Monitor de Reputación Sanitaria Española*, a national reputation ranking specialized in public hospitals and published in 2019. To do so, Merco conducted 6.149 interviews to health professionals working in different

<sup>1</sup> Source: <https://www.conectandopacientes.es/>

Spanish public hospitals, and evaluated 2.525 medical services based on 2.853 key performance indicators.<sup>2</sup> This ranking identifies the 100 best public hospitals in Spain according to their reputation (see Appendix 1, List of hospitals analyzed).

For each hospital, we analyzed how they implemented branding initiatives on four platforms: a) their corporate website, b) *Facebook*, c) *Twitter* and d) *Youtube*.<sup>3</sup> Corporate websites centralize hospitals' online communication strategies (Lee et al., 2015); nevertheless, these organizations also manage other platforms such as *Facebook*, the most important social media in the world with more than 2.603 million users<sup>4</sup>; *Twitter*, a platform that helps organizations make

their branding initiatives more dynamic (Park et al., 2016); and *Youtube*, the best platform to share videos and disseminate scientific content in a visual way (Kotsenas et al., 2018).

In order to analyze how Spanish public hospitals managed their brands in these four platforms, we defined 48 key performance indicators covering three main categories: a) identity, b) communication activities, and c) patients' engagement (see Table 1, Key Performance Indicators). Most of these indicators focused on how hospitals disseminated brand-related content: values, mission, vision, etc. We tried to homogenize these indicators in all platforms; nevertheless, we also considered the different metrics proposed by each social media platform. For each indicator, we only considered inputs that we could immediately retrieve (*Homepage*, *About Us* section): in other words, we did not evaluate inputs for which we needed to do more than one click and browser on different menus. We only analyzed hospitals' corporate profiles, and hence disregarded secondary profiles (departments, events, etc.).

2 More information about this methodology available on: <https://www.merco.info/es/monitor-reputacion-sanitaria-hospitales>. Document retrieved on 14th July 2022.

3 We carried out this analysis from 10th August 2022 to 5th September 2022.

4 In January 2022, more than 2,89 billion people in the world used this platform every month. Document retrieved on 2nd August 2022 on: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272014/global-social-networks-ranked-by-number-of-users/>

Table 1. Key Performance Indicators

CORPORATE WEBSITE	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE
<b>Identity*</b>			
1. Corporate logo	1. Corporate logo	1. Corporate logo	1. Corporate logo
2. Multilingual website	2. Links to corporate websites	2. Links to corporate websites	2. Links to corporate websites
3. Links to medical departments	3. Hospital's description	3. Hospital's description	3. Hospital's description
4. Find a doctor	4. Milestones	4. Joined date	4. Milestones
5. Find diseases	5. Awards	5. Foundation date	5. Awards
6. Links to research and education departments	6. Brand values	6. Hashtags on the description	6. Brand values
7. Link to the Communication Department	7. Mission	7. Health professionals or hospital's building on the main image	7. Mission
8. Links to social media platforms	8. Vision	8. Links to other social media platforms	8. Vision

CORPORATE WEBSITE	FACEBOOK	TWITTER	YOUTUBE
<b>Communication Activities**</b>			
9. Videos on the homepage	9. Videos integrated	9. Number of followings	9. Playlists
10. Press releases on the homepage	10. Events	10. Media section with videos	10. Channels
<b>Patient's engagement***</b>			
11. Patients' platform	11. Number of likes	11. Number of likes	11. Number of subscribers
12. Mobile apps	12. Number of followers	12. Number of followers	12. Number of views

\*Homepage on the Corporate Website and Twitter; and About Us Section on Facebook and Youtube.

\*\* Homepage for all platforms.

\*\*\* Homepage for all platforms.

To summarize, we focused on 100 units of analysis (hospitals), four variables (corporate website, *Facebook*, *Twitter* and *Youtube*) and three main categories (identity, communication activities and patient's engagement). All these indicators were analyzed according to the binary system, except seven of them that were evaluated as absolute numbers: *Facebook* (11, 12), *Twitter* (9, 11, 12) and *Youtube* (11, 12).

## 4. RESULTS

Most Spanish public hospitals resorted to their corporate websites and to different social media platforms to reinforce their corporate reputation. Nevertheless, according to our results, many of them were not really performant. We grouped our results in four main categories: a) corporate website, b) *Facebook*, c) *Twitter* and d) *Youtube*.

### 1. Corporate website

According to our results, 68% of hospitals managed a corporate website. Hospitals using as their website the one provided by their regional health authority were not considered for this study. Concerning those that had their own website, most of them respect-

ed the main criteria related to *identity*: links to medical departments (96%), links to research and education (93%), to the Communication Department (84%), logo (82%), links to social media platforms (56%), multilingual website (34%), and search engine to find diseases (19%) or doctors (6%). As to *communication activities and patients' engagement*, 81% of hospitals published press releases on the homepage, but only 15% disseminated videos; on the other hand, not many hospitals proposed a patient platform (26%) or mobile apps (9%). Finally, 42% of hospitals respected between 6 and 8 indicators (see Table 2, Indicators' distribution), and only 7 hospitals met at least 9 criteria (see Table 3. Hospitals respecting at least 9 criteria).

**Table 2.** Indicators' distribution

NUMBER OF INDICATORS	NUMBER OF HOSPITALS
12	0
11	0
10	1
9	6
8	8

NUMBER OF INDICATORS	NUMBER OF HOSPITALS
7	9
6	25
5	7
4	3
3	7
2	2
1	1
0	31

**Table 3.** Hospitals respecting at least 9 criteria

NUMBER OF INDICATORS	HOSPITALS
10	Hospital de Manises
9	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz
	Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de A Coruña
	Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba
	Hospital Universitario Rey Juan Carlos de Móstoles
	Hospital Universitario Germans Trias i Pujol
	Hospital de Son Llatzer

## 2. Facebook

Our results proved that 41% of hospitals had a corporate profile on this social media platform. However, some of them used *Facebook* and did not explain that on their corporate website; on the other hand, some hospitals had a corporate profile on *Facebook*, but they did not have a corporate website. Non-official

profiles on *Facebook*, as well as hospitals using as corporate profile those of their regional health authorities were not considered in this study. Even if most hospitals respected some criteria related to *identity* (links to corporate websites -98%, corporate logo as main profile image -88%, and corporate description -56,10%-), only 4,88% explained their milestones and no one described their awards, brand values, mission, and vision. With respect to *communication activities*, all hospitals integrated videos into their corporate profile, and 41% showcased a link to the events section. On the other hand, concerning *patients' engagement*, the three main hospitals by number of likes and followers were *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz*, *Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba* and *Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe* (see Table 4, Hospitals by number of likes, and Table 5, Hospitals by number of followers). Finally, 37% of hospitals respected between 3 and 5 indicators; and only ten of them met at least 5 criteria.

**Table 4.** Hospitals by number of likes

	HOSPITAL	# LIKES
1	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz	73.994
2	Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba	39.002
3	Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe	28.143
4	Hospital Universitario de Torrejón	18.290
5	Hospital Universitari Son Espases	15.026
6	Hospital Universitario Puerta del Mar	14.870
7	Consorti Hospital General Universitari de Valencia	13.317
8	Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron	12.848
9	Complejo Hospitalario Torrecardenas	11.336
10	Hospital Clinic de Barcelona	11.284

**Table 5. Hospitals by number of followers**

	HOSPITAL	# OF FOLLOWERS
1	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz	75.620
2	Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba	43.834
3	Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe	43.804
4	Hospital General Universitario de Alicante	35.738
5	Hospital Universitario Virgen del Rocío	24.873
6	Consorci Hospital General Universitari de Valencia	21.634
7	Hospital Universitario de Torrejon	18.843
8	Hospital Universitari Son Espases	15.510
9	Hospital Universitario Puerta del Mar	15.390
10	Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron	13.962

### 3. Twitter

According to our results, 47% of hospitals had a corporate profile on this platform. However, some hospitals having a profile on *Twitter* did not explain that on their corporate website; and, in other cases, hospitals displayed a profile on *Twitter* but not a corporate website. Non-official profiles on *Twitter*, as well as hospitals using as corporate profile those of their regional health authorities were not considered in this study. Concerning key performance indicators related to *identity*, hospitals fulfilled some criteria such as joined date (100%), logo on the main profile image (98%), links to the corporate website (98%), health professionals or buildings as part of the main profile image (85,11%), and corporate description (53,19%). Nevertheless, only some hospitals met other criteria: hashtags on their description (14,89%), foundation date (2,12%) or links to

other social media platforms (2,12%). With respect to *communication activities*, 68% of hospitals included a media section with videos; and, the most active ones in terms of following were *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz*, *Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Huelva* and *Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Valdemoro* (see *Table 6. Hospitals by number of following*). As to *patients' engagement*, the three best hospitals in terms of number of likes were *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz*, *Hospital Clinic de Barcelona* and *Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron* (see *Table 7. Hospitals by number of likes*); and the best ones by number of followers were *Hospital Clinic de Barcelona* (46 600), *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz* (40 300) and *Hospital del Mar* (19 900). Finally, 37% of hospitals respected between 4 and 6 indicators; and the only one meeting 8 criteria was *Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba*.

**Table 6. Hospitals by number of following**

	HOSPITAL	# OF FOLLOWING
1	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz	17.500
2	Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Huelva	7835
3	Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Valdemoro	7833
4	Hospital General de Villalba	7545
5	Hospital Universitario Rey Juan Carlos de Móstoles	7117
6	Hospital Clinic de Barcelona	5745
7	Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge	2592
8	Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron	1757
9	Hospital Clínico Universitario de Valencia	1744
10	Hospital General Universitario de Alicante	1606

**Table 7. Hospitals by number of likes**

	HOSPITAL	# OF LIKES
1	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz	67.500
2	Hospital Clinic de Barcelona	38.100
3	Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron	25.200
4	Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau	18.400
5	Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe	15.600
6	Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge	15.000
7	Hospital Universitario Virgen del Rocío	12.500
8	Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba	10.500
9	Hospital del Mar	10.400
10	Hospital de Son Llatzer	6.105

#### 4. Youtube

Out of 100 hospitals analyzed in this paper, only 32 had a corporate profile on this platform. Some hospitals having a profile on *Youtube* did not explain that on their corporate website; on the other hand, some hospitals had a profile on this platform but not a corporate website. Hospitals using as profile those of their regional public authority were not considered. Concerning *identity*, only three criteria were respected by some hospitals: logo on the main profile image (91%), links to corporate websites (37,50%) and corporate description (25%). No hospital explained anything about awards, brand values, mission and vision; and only 3,13% of them described their main milestones. As to *communication activities*, 53% of hospitals showcased playlists and 21,88% displayed channels. With respect to *patients' engagement*, the best hospitals in terms of sub-

scribers were *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz*, *Centro Hospitalario Universitario de Albacete* and *Hospital Universitari Son Espases* (see *Table 8. Hospitals by number of subscribers*); and the best ones by number of views were *Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Albacete* (10 968 782 views), *Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz* (6 973 475 views) and *Hospital Clinic de Barcelona* (6 092 900 views). Finally, 56,25% of hospitals respected 1-2 key performance indicators.

**Table 8 . Hospitals by number of subscribers**

	HOSPITAL	# OF SUBSCRIBERS
1	Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz	21.300
2	Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Albacete	16.300
3	Hospital Universitari Son Espases	7.540
4	Hospital Universitario de Guadalajara	6.970
5	Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe	3.620
6	Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron	2.510
7	Consorci Hospital General Universitari de Valencia	1.750
8	Hospital de Manises	1.000
9	Hospital Clínico San Carlos	797
10	Hospital de Sabadell	665

#### 5. DISCUSSION

Most Spanish public hospitals did not manage online corporate communication in a professional way: 32% of them did not even have a corporate website, 53% did not manage *Twitter*, 59% did not have a corporate profile on *Facebook*, and 68% did not use *Youtube*. Moreover, some of them did not integrate their corporate websites with their social media platforms:

in other words, they had a profile on *Facebook*, *Twitter* or *Youtube*, but they did not have a link on their corporate website to direct patients to these platforms. Other hospitals did not develop their own platforms: they preferred to use the official profiles of their regional health authorities. This lack of professionalism can negatively impact on these hospitals' corporate communication strategies: communication objectives, targets, and brand positioning.

**Communication objectives.** Social media allow hospitals to improve collective decision-making processes among doctors and patients, as well as health services quality (Lim, 2016). These platforms reinforce the dialogue among doctors and patients, enhance health education initiatives and improve the knowledge sharing (Visser et al., 2016). However, to do that, hospitals need to recruit experts in social media and assign a budget for these activities (Rando Cueto & de las Heras Pedrosa, 2016). According to our results, most Spanish public hospitals did not employ experts in online corporate communication, that is why 85% of them did not use videos on their corporate website; no hospital explained on *Facebook* or *Youtube* anything about their awards, brand values, mission and vision (brand architecture); 85,11% these organizations did not even use hashtags on their corporate description on *Twitter*, and 78,12% of them did not use channels on *Youtube*.

**Targets.** Even if hospitals interact with many different stakeholders such as media companies, public authorities or unions, the most important targets remain patients and employees (Medina Aguerrebere, 2019). Patients are true opinion leaders who influence hospitals' public image (Becerra et al., 2015); and employees play a key role as hospitals' brand ambassadors (Blackstone & Pressman, 2016; Jahromi et al., 2016). However, most Spanish public hospitals did not make enough efforts on social media to focus on these two targets. In fact, on their corporate website, only 9% of hospitals proposed mobile apps for patients, and only 26% of them showcased a patient platform; on *Facebook*, 59% of hospitals did not even showcase an event section to explain to patients the hospital's corporate events; and on *Youtube*, 62,50% of hospitals did not propose links to their corporate websites or to other

social media platforms. Finally, concerning employees, only 6% of hospitals included on their corporate websites a search engine to find doctors; and, on *Youtube*, only 53% of hospitals had playlists to showcase videos about their doctors and nurses.

**Brand positioning.** Brands refer to intangible and tangible elements that companies use to create an added value (Esposito, 2017). Hospitals need to integrate their brands into internal and external processes to build a consistent reputation (Nelson et al., 2014) and in this way reinforce their strategic positionings in the health market (Kemp et al., 2014). Unfortunately, most Spanish public hospitals did not use social media to build a reputed brand in a professional way. For example, most hospitals did not do an effort to publish a corporate description allowing stakeholders to understand the organization's brand: *Facebook* (56,10%), *Twitter* (53,19%), *Youtube* (25%). Concerning milestones, most hospitals did not even have a section for that: *Facebook* (95,2%) and *Youtube* (96,87%). Finally, on *Youtube*, a platform that has become a reference to build brands, 56,25% of hospitals only respected between 1-2 key performance indicators.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Using social media as a corporate communication tool constitutes a true challenge for many hospitals. This paper aimed to identify the main initiatives implemented by Spanish public hospitals on *Facebook*, *Twitter*, *Youtube* as well as on their corporate websites to reinforce their reputation. According to our results, as well as our literature review, we can identify three main branding initiatives. First, on their corporate websites, most hospitals implement a journalistic approach based on disseminating content related to the hospital: links to medical departments, links to research and education sections, links to the Communication Department, as well as publication of press releases. Second, *Facebook* and *Twitter* are mainly used to share visual information about the hospital's brand: logo, corporate videos, and pictures of health professionals. And third, on *Youtube*, most hospitals published videos about medical treatments or internal protocols to explain to

stakeholders the organization's corporate culture and create an added value.

Even if some Spanish public hospitals developed their communication strategies on social media in professional way, most of them should urgently improve in this area. To do that, we propose three main managerial recommendations. First, hospitals need to recruit experts in social media, create a Social Media Unit with the hospital's Corporate Communication Department, assign a budget, and implement an annual communication plan based on protocols and key performance indicators. Second, experts in social media need to focus on strategies (communication objectives, main and secondary targets, brand positioning) rather than final products (posts, videos, etc.), otherwise they will never be able to build a meaningful brand. And third, hospitals must integrate social media into some internal protocols to accelerate the organization's digital transformation, and this way promote the value of health communication.

This study has allowed us to better understand how Spanish public hospitals used social media to promote their brands. However, we must highlight three main limitations affecting this article: we did not contact hospitals' corporate communication departments to understand why they managed social media in this way; we did not contact these hospitals' stakeholders to evaluate their perceptions about how these organizations use social media for branding purposes; and finally we did not find similar papers about Spanish public hospitals, which did not allow us to compare our results. We recommend researchers interested in developing this area in the next years to focus on how to train doctors and nurses to become brand ambassadors able to use social media in a professional way; how to use these platforms to reinforce the hospital's brand architecture (identity, values, mission, vision and culture); and how to evaluate stakeholders' perceptions about the hospitals' branding effort on social media. 

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### Appendix 1: List of hospitals analyzed

- » Hospital Universitario La Paz
- » Hospital Clinic de Barcelona
- » Hospital General Universitario Gregorio Marañón
- » Hospital Universitario 12 de Octubre
- » Hospital Universitari Vall d'Hebron
- » Hospital Universitari i Politecnic La Fe
- » Hospital Universitario Ramon y Cajal
- » Hospital Universitario Fundación Jiménez Díaz
- » Hospital Universitario Virgen del Rocío
- » Hospital Clínico San Carlos
- » Hospital Universitario Puerta de Hierro Majadahonda
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de A Coruña
- » Hospital Universitari de Bellvitge
- » Hospital Clínico Universitario Virgen de la Arrixaca
- » Hospital Universitario Virgen Macarena
- » Hospital Universitario Reina Sofía de Córdoba
- » Hospital de la Santa Creu i Sant Pau
- » Hospital Universitario Central de Asturias
- » Complejo Asistencial Universitario de Salamanca
- » Hospital Regional Universitario de Málaga
- » Hospital Universitario Doctor Peset
- » Hospital Universitario Rio Hortega
- » Hospital Universitario Rey Juan Carlos de Móstoles
- » Hospital General Universitario de Ciudad Real
- » Hospital de Manises
- » Hospital Galdakao - Usansolo
- » Hospital Clínico Universitario de Valladolid
- » Hospital Clínico Universitario de Valencia
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Albacete
- » Complejo Hospitalario Torrecardenas
- » Hospital Universitario Fundación Alcorcón
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Cartagena
- » Hospital Universitario de Cruces
- » Hospital Universitario de la Princesa
- » Hospital Universitario Marqués De Valdecilla
- » Hospital del Mar
- » Hospital Universitario Nuestra Señora de Candelaria
- » Hospital Universitario Puerta del Mar
- » Hospital Universitario Puerto Real
- » Hospital Universitario Virgen de Valme
- » Hospital Universitario Virgen de las Nieves
- » Hospital Universitario Araba
- » Hospital Universitario Virgen de la Victoria
- » Hospital Juan Ramon Jimenez
- » Hospital Clínico Universitario San Cecilio
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Badajoz
- » Hospital Universitario Infanta Leonor
- » Hospital Universitari Son Espases
- » Complejo Hospitalario de Jaén
- » Hospital Universitario de Cabueñes
- » Hospital General Universitario de Alicante
- » Complejo Hospitalario La Mancha Centro
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Cáceres
- » Hospital Universitario de Guadalajara
- » Complejo Hospitalario del Área de Salud de Mérida
- » Hospital Universitario de Gran Canaria Dr. Negrín
- » Hospital Universitario Severo Ochoa

- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Santiago
- » Hospital General Universitario Reina Sofía Murcia
- » Hospital Universitario Miguel Servet
- » Hospital Costa del Sol
- » Hospital Universitario de Torrejón
- » Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Huelva
- » Complejo Hospitalario de Navarra
- » Hospital Universitario Germans Trias i Pujol
- » Consorci Hospital General Universitari de Valencia
- » Complejo Asistencial Universitario de León
- » Hospital Virgen de la Luz Cuenca
- » Hospital Clínico Universitario Lozano Blesa
- » Hospital Universitario San Juan de Alicante
- » Hospital General de Villalba
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Vigo
- » Hospital de Basurto
- » Hospital Universitario Infanta Sofía
- » Hospital Universitario de Getafe
- » Hospital Universitario de Donostia
- » Hospital Comarcal La Merced
- » Hospital Universitario de Fuenlabrada
- » Hospital General Universitario Morales Meseguer
- » Hospital Universitario Príncipe de Asturias
- » Hospital Universitario Mutua Terrassa
- » Hospital Universitario San Agustín de Asturias
- » Hospital de Sabadell
- » Complejo Hospitalario San Millán San Pedro de la Rioja
- » Complejo Hospitalario de Toledo
- » Hospital Universitario Arnau de Vilanova Lleida
- » Hospital Central de la Defensa Gómez Ulla
- » Complejo Asistencial Universitario de Burgos
- » Hospital General Universitario de Elda
- » Hospital Universitario Infanta Elena de Valdemoro
- » CHU Insular Materno Infantil de Canarias
- » Hospital Universitari Girona Doctor Josep Trueta
- » Hospital de Son Llatzer
- » Hospital San Pedro de Alcántara
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Pontevedra
- » Hospital General Universitario de Elche
- » Hospital Universitari Joan XXIII Tarragona
- » Hospital Universitario Arnau de Vilanova Valencia
- » Complejo Asistencial de Zamora
- » Complejo Hospitalario Universitario de Lugo

### **Declaration of interest statement**

We have no conflict of interest to declare.