The influence of national cultures on CSR Communication

Influencia de la cultura nacional en la gestión de comunicación para la sostenibilidad

A influência das culturas nacionais na gestão da comunicação de RSE

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ABSTRACT | This paper shows the preliminary results of an exploratory study of a quantitative nature that aims to test the effectiveness of the Convergence Model of Sustainability and Communication Contexts, previously tested in Ecuadorian companies, and to recognize key variables of efficient CSR Communication in the Latin American context. To this purpose, it shows the results of surveys conducted among corporate affairs managers at large companies in Ecuador, Colombia and Chile, and their interpretation from the perspective of the cultural profiles prepared by Hofstede Insights for each country. The results show that national culture influences CSR communication strategies: for example, the orientation of Ecuadorian companies towards the common good can be explained by their cultural tendency towards collectivism; the inclination to accountability, typical of Chilean organizations, is related to the cultural orientation towards greater demands regarding civil and individual rights, and the evident concern in Colombia for the interests of the public is related to the cultural trend toward planning and budgeting.

KEYWORDS: sustainability; public relations; national culture; large companies; Ecuador; Colombia; Chile.

RESUMEN | *Este artículo muestra los resultados preliminares de un estudio exploratorio de carácter cuantitativo que tiene por objetivo someter a prueba la eficacia del Modelo de Convergencia de Contextos de Sustentabilidad y Comunicación, previamente testeado en compañías ecuatorianas, y reconocer las variables clave de una eficiente comunicación para la sostenibilidad en el contexto latinoamericano. Para ello, muestra los resultados de encuestas realizadas a gerentes de asuntos corporativos de grandes empresas de Ecuador, Colombia y Chile, y su interpretación desde la perspectiva de los perfiles culturales elaborados por Hofstede Insights para cada país. Los resultados muestran que la cultura nacional influye en las estrategias de comunicación para la sostenibilidad: por ejemplo, la orientación de las empresas ecuatorianas hacia el bien común puede explicarse por su tendencia cultural al colectivismo; la inclinación a la rendición de cuentas, propia de las organizaciones en Chile, guarda relación con la orientación cultural hacia una mayor exigencia en torno a derechos civiles e individuales, y la preocupación que se evidencia en Colombia por los intereses de los públicos está relacionada con la tendencia cultural hacia la planificación y presupuestación.*

PALABRAS CLAVE: *sostenibilidad; relaciones públicas; cultura nacional; grandes empresas; Ecuador; Colombia; Chile.*

RESUMO | Este artigo apresenta os resultados preliminares de um estudo exploratório de natureza quantitativa que visa testar a eficácia do Modelo de Convergência de Contextos de Sustentabilidade e Comunicação, previamente testado em empresas equatorianas, e reconhecer variáveis-chave de uma eficiente comunicação para a sustentabilidade no contexto latino-americano. Para isso, mostra os resultados de pesquisas realizadas com diretores de assuntos corporativos de grandes empresas do Equador, da Colômbia e do Chile, e sua interpretação a partir dos perfis culturais elaborados por Hofstede Insights para cada país. Os resultados mostram que a cultura nacional influencia as estratégias de comunicação para a sustentabilidade: por exemplo, a orientação das empresas equatorianas para o bem comum pode ser explicada por sua tendência cultural para o coletivismo; a inclinação para a prestação de contas típica das organizações no Chile, está relacionada com a orientação cultural para maiores exigências com respeito aos direitos civis e individuais; e a preocupação que é evidente na Colômbia com os interesses do público está relacionada com a tendência cultural para o planejamento e orçamentação.

PALAVRAS CHAVE: sustentabilidade; relações públicas; cultura nacional; grandes empresas; Equador; Colômbia; Chile.

INTRODUCTION

Just by reading the news a little we can see that 2019 has been a year in which, on a global scale, there has been much debate about the ecological crisis and the need for the public and private sectors to commit to sustainable development. In this context, we have conducted a study on communication strategies and practices for sustainability of large companies in three South American countries (Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile). Its purpose has been to measure the effectiveness of the model proposed by Durán and Mosquera (2016a), which, in general terms, seeks to characterize communication practices and relate them to business policies that allow social, economic, and environmental sustainability.

Sustainable development has been defined, for more than 30 years, as "one that guarantees the satisfaction of the needs of the current generation without sacrificing the ability of future generations to meet theirs" (Organización de Naciones Unidas, 1987, p. 24). The specialized literature (Raven, Berg, & Hassenzahl, 2010, p. 12) usually adds that, thanks to the contribution of Elkington (1998), this idea has been made operational by equitably assessing the economic, social, and environmental aspects of development.

The implementation of these ideas in organizations and institutions is largely based on efforts of the UN itself, which through the Global Compact has disseminated a series of principles and models applicable to the development and evaluation of a sustainable administration, as well as the promotion of corporate social responsibility (Organización de Naciones Unidas, 2014). This effort is shared by other private entities, such as the Global Reporting Initiative (GRI), AccountAbility and the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which on their own –although in line with the UN's principles– have promoted resources and standards to measure business sustainability.

This approach dialogues with the stakeholder paradigm (Freeman, Harrison, & Wicks, 2007), according to which organizations must develop considering the needs and expectations of those internal and external agents that are affected by their activity, or that can affect it (such as customers and suppliers, but also governments and neighborhood leaders, media, and communities), and not only those of its owners or shareholders. Therefore, sustainability is currently recognized as a strategic dimension for business management (Schaltegger, 2011), and communication of/for sustainability has become a very relevant task (Du, Bhattacharya, & Sen, 2010), even in Latin America (Durán & Ferrari, 2018).

From this perspective, the premise is that stakeholders do not only seek to buy a quality product/service, but to relate to a responsible organization (Blázquez & Peretti, 2010). This has made corporate communications management a

complex function: rather than persuading or trying to control audiences with mainly media resources, such as advertising, its mandate is to facilitate sustainability processes through comprehensive, two-way, and honest communication, which allows the organization to enhance its intangible assets of reputation and trust (Godoy-Etcheverry & Opazo, 2015; Cornelissen, 2017).

All of this implies a management that incorporates ethics, social responsibility, and sustainability as essential dimensions in communication practices with stakeholders, considering their expectations and interests (Díaz-Cáceres & Castaño-Quintero, 2015).

In Latin America, it is relatively easy to find theoretical studies on the link between the management of corporate communications –or public relations or institutional communication, etc.– and that of sustainability or social responsibility in organizations (Alvarado & Schlesinger, 2008; Costa -Sánchez, 2009; Lattuada, 2010; Ferrari & França, 2011; Newman & Mejía, 2011; Míguez & Baamonde, 2011; Blázquez & Peretti, 2010; Sánchez de Walther, 2012; Túñez-López & Valarezo, 2012). However, at the time of designing this research, no applied research was found on the implementation of business strategies and the practices of communication professionals in this area. This article seeks to provide new knowledge on the subject from data obtained through a survey of those responsible for corporate communication or for sustainability in some of the largest companies in Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile.

The following section briefly describes the state of the art in sustainability in Latin America, with emphasis on the three countries participating in the study; the main guidelines of the research are presented, which are anchored in the Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model (Durán & Mosquera, 2016a, 2016b; Durán, Mosquera, & Vega, 2017), and we suggest an approach to assess the results considering the cultural profiles of each country, based on the characterizations made by the consulting firm Hofstede Insights. After the methodological section, the results show that, despite sharing elements of Latin American identity, the culture of each country influences both communication strategies for sustainability and their implementation. Finally, a brief discussion of the data is offered and opportunities for future research are identified.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK
Sustainability in Latin America
Although the sustainable development paradigm was introduced late in Latin America, compared to what happened in the United States and Europe (Sanjuán

& García, 2013), and even until the first years of this century it was considered a secondary issue (Correa, Flynn, & Amit, 2004), it is estimated that since 2005 it has experienced an accelerated growth (Sierra-García, García-Benau, & Zorio, 2014). In fact, in recent years, Latin America has been the region with the second highest rate of projects on the subject in the world, considering environmental, social, and corporate governance initiatives (Abramo, 2016).

However, there are differences between the region's countries. According to Morales (2012), the leading countries in sustainability are Brazil, Mexico, and Chile, followed by the group formed by Colombia, Argentina, and Central America in general –whose state is equivalent or close to the average– and, finally, the rest of the nations, among which is Ecuador, where the management of social responsibility is emerging or initial.

In the Ecuadorian case, although since the middle of the 20th century there have been philanthropic and charitable initiatives by the business community (Fundación Esquel, 1998), the formal and professional adoption of sustainability is a recent phenomenon. In fact, even at the beginning of this decade there was a certain ignorance of the subject –and at times, disinterest– in part of the business sector and in civil society (Lima & López, 2012). In the words of Túñez-López and Valarezo, "SCR initiatives are still solo races that do not allow us to speak of a complete take-off in Ecuador, unlike countries of the Andean Community such as Colombia or Peru, or others such as Argentina or Chile" (2012, p. 61).

Nevertheless, the emergence during the last decade of entities such as the Business Council for Sustainable Development of Ecuador (CEMDES, by its Spanish acronym), the Ecuadorian Consortium for Social Responsibility (CERES, by its Spanish acronym), the Institute for Corporate Social Responsibility (IRSE, by its Spanish acronym), and the Ecuador Global Compact Network (www.pactoglobal-ecuador.org) has helped more and more companies take their sustainability processes seriously, with communicators receiving training in this regard, both in the country and abroad.

According to Viteri & Jácome (2011), another relevant factor for the acquisition of the sustainability paradigm in Ecuador has been globalization: the opening of its markets has motivated companies to learn new ways of competing and to adopt new technologies and practices, which include the ethical-social and communication aspects. However, they state, although more than half of the companies conduct some activity related to social responsibility, very few prepare sustainability reports and adequately disseminate their strategies and practices.

For Ferrari & Durán (2018), corporate social responsibility is in its initial stage since, although more than half of the companies carry out some activity related to social responsibility, very few prepare sustainability reports and adequately disseminate their strategies and practices. In the same way, the number of qualified companies is small and not all of them fully comply with the laws and legal regulations regarding the different areas of responsibility; even less can it be considered that they seek to go beyond what is legally required, which is essential to recognize a socially, economically, and environmentally responsible management.

According to various studies on CSR and sustainability (Velasco, 2006; Orozco-Toro, 2007; Vives, 2011; Alvarado, 2012), something that characterizes the Colombian case is that the companies themselves find it difficult to distinguish between the communication actions they conduct on this matter. Some call them communication for sustainability, but others talk about social marketing, marketing with a cause, corporate social marketing, and social responsibility. Likewise, this conceptual diversity is reflected in a variety of reasons: the first steps taken by Colombian companies in terms of sustainable development were mainly aimed at complying with certain legal regulations, being *trendy* with a theme that generated visibility, and responding to pressures from some stakeholders, rather than responding to their own and strategic initiatives (Noguera, 2004; Ángel, 2009; Leff, 2014).

This rather reactive attitude has been seen in companies in sectors such as banking, mining, and retail, which have developed campaigns related to sustainability only after having received sanctions from the government entity in charge of consumer protection (Colombia's Superintendency of Industry and Commerce, SIC). In this regard, many campaigns can be considered only a resource to generate image and corporate reputation, a *facelift* that seeks to generate benefits by increasing the brands' intangible value (Orozco-Toro, 2018). Similarly, although several corporate communication agencies adhere to the Global Compact with letters of intent, very few make annual reports on the progress of their management and commitments in the matter, which denotes a palpable reality: this adhesion is used only as a tool to improve the company's image (Ferré-Pavia & Orozco-Toro, 2012, p. 101).

Therefore, there is a certain suspicion regarding social responsibility actions in Colombia. For example, Luyando argues that many companies "hypocritically profess sustainable development, as a means of advertising and reputation among society and seeking individual benefit" (2016, p. 319).

In Chile, unlike other countries, communications management for sustainability was not established due to consumer demands or legal regulations, but rather due to the influence of non-governmental organizations and foreign companies

established in the country. The former are recognized for having acknowledged the importance of engagement with stakeholders and civil society, and the latter, for the introduction of good practices in a business culture that traditionally only valued economic development (Beckman, Colwell, & Cunningham, 2009).

This is probably why Chilean literature on strategic and business communication tends to include sustainability as a key topic, usually linked to issues such as corporate identity, reputational and crisis management (Tironi & Cavallo, 2006; Halpern, 2010; Tironi, 2011; Venturino, 2011; Godoy-Etcheverry & Opazo, 2015). In short, in the Chilean case, communication management has been very important for the promotion of sustainability as an administration paradigm (Matus, 2018), above all because of the relevance currently given to the ability to manage effective links with the social environment (Beckman et al., 2009).

However, there are questions regarding the absence of spaces for reflection and criticism on social responsibility and its scope, as well as on the quality of journalistic coverage in this regard (Burgos, 2014). For example, Browne (2010) warns that, although the country's main newspapers (*El Mercurio* and *La Tercera*) have given more and more space to news on the subject, the homogeneity of the actors represented or consulted –usually large companies–, the abuse of single sources, and the frequency of uncritical framing make the coverage a little superficial. From the citizens' point of view, the situation is no better: 56% believe that Chilean companies are unethical and that entrepreneurs are not trustworthy, while 66% say that organizations do not conduct their activities without compromising resources and future generations' possibilities (Acción Empresas, 2015).

The above allows to say that, despite its state of maturity, in Chile there is still a need for greater and better communication for sustainability. Nevertheless, as there is no specific legislation on the subject in the country, but only on the specific areas of mass communication (such as the exercise of journalism or the rights of consumers regarding advertising), there are no official parameters to assess the quality of this communication.

The convergence model

As has been suggested in the previous sections, one of the premises of corporate communication is that its comprehensive practice constitutes a contribution to the organizations' management, within which the implementation of sustainability strategies is included. However, by reviewing specialized literature on public relations or strategic communication, it is not possible to identify models that operatively explain this link (Durán & Mosquera, 2016b), even less from Latin America. This lack motivated the development of the Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model (Durán & Mosquera, 2016a).

In simple terms, this proposal arose from the interrelation of three previous theoretical frameworks. The first is the distinction of public relations management forms, formulated by Grunig & Hunt (2000 [1984]), according to which this discipline tends to be practiced in four ways: through the role of *press agent*, which promotes unidirectional communication, vertical and argumentatively simple or even ludic; with an emphasis on *public information*, which also implies a unidirectional and vertical contact, but with a focus on transparency and accountability; through a *bidirectional asymmetric* interaction, based on the study of audience's trends and opinions, or through a *bidirectional symmetric* link, which aspires to mutual understanding between the organization and its audiences.

The second theoretical framework is the categorization of paradigms of social responsibility, identified by Garriga & Melé (2004). According to this perspective, sustainability becomes operative in an *instrumental* way when management is mainly interested in meeting economic objectives thanks to solidarity or philanthropic actions; with *political* emphasis, when the dimension of corporate citizenship and the companies' response to the demands of public opinion are promoted; *integrator*, when the stakeholders' demands operate as inputs for the organization's strategies, and *ethically*, when more intangible and long-term aspects are emphasized, such as human rights, the common good, and sustainable development.

The model's third theoretical support is the proposal of the *continuum of collaboration*, by Austin & Reficco (2005), according to which public and private organizations establish active links for sustainability in three ways: *philanthropic*, when it is based on a donation that does not implies true involvement; *transactional*, when the link responds to each other's strategies, and both parties obtain something from the relationship, and *integrative*, when deep and lasting alliances are produced, the result of a joint strategy.

Based on the recognition of the coincidences between these theories, Durán & Mosquera (2016a, 2016b) identify four types of strategic-organizational context for the management of communication for sustainability (figure 1).

This model proposes four contexts or situations: from the simplest to the most complex, there would be organizations focused preferably on their business' development, on accountability to society, on the interests of their public/stakeholders and on the common good. The model suggests defining the profile of each company based on data such as the sector of which it belongs, its economic activity, its mission, its declared values, the type of relationship it maintains with its public, and its environmental-social management (Durán & Mosquera, 2016a).
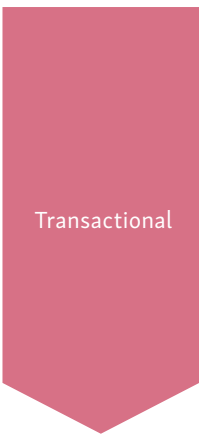
Forms of public relations management (Grunig & Hunt, 2000)	Social responsibility paradigms (Garriga & Melé, 2004)	Collaboration continuum (Austin & Reficco, 2005)	Sustainability and communication contexts
Press agent • Unidirectional communication • Integrated marketing communication • Cause marketing	Instrumental theories • SR seen as an advantage over the competition	Philanthropic	**Business-focused organizations** ✓ Begins working on SR ✓ Philanthropic relationships
Public information • Unidirectional communication • Transparency and accountability	Political theories • Seeks that SR gives an account of who the organization is in the political arena	Transactional	**Organizations focused on accountability** ✓ More complex SR work ✓ Greater exchange of values
Bidirectional asymmetric • Bidirectional communication with focus on the organization • Audience research	Integrative theories • Concern for stakeholders • SR based on mutual benefits		**Organizations focused on the interests of the public** ✓ SR based on stakeholder needs ✓ SR as an enabler of crisis-free management
Bidirectional symmetric • Bidirectional communication with horizontal focus • Dialogue with the public	Ethical theories • Based on universal values • Recognize that all organizations, in some way, impact society	Integrative	**Organizations focused on the common good** ✓ SR with axis imposed by the values of the organization ✓ Intention of dialogue with stakeholders

Figure 1. Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model

Source: Own elaboration based on Durán and Mosquera (2016b).

The premise is that for each context there will be a more appropriate communication management style, which along with allowing the design and evaluation of strategies in this regard would permit to define the coordination mechanisms and even the optimal professional profiles for each one (Durán & Mosquera, 2016b).

National cultures and communication

One of the factors that could explain the similarities and differences in communication for the sustainability of Ecuadorian, Colombian, and Chilean companies is the cultural profile of each country. Although it has not been free

from questioning (Voronov & Singer, 2002; Chiang, 2005; Venaik & Brewer, 2013), the main effort to characterize nations culturally and link these profiles to organizational management has been led by Geert Hofstede.

The general theory (Hofstede, 2001) identified five dimensions of cultural analysis linked to values and practices: the relationship of dependence between people (individualism/collectivism), the acceptance of inequality (distance from power), the way to face the unknown (rejection of uncertainty), the existence of social-emotional roles (female/male), and the preferred time perspective (long/short term). Recently (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010) a sixth dimension was added: the management of natural impulses (debauchery/moderation).

In a recent work, Hofstede (2015) has insisted that the cultural differences between countries also allow us to notice different styles of communication, valid for both interpersonal and organizational situations. The premise is that a company, being part of a certain community-nation, would be aware of these forms and consider them when developing and disseminating strategic messages, such as those derived from its sustainability strategy.

In this framework, Latin American countries tend to manifest a collectivist culture, which in the field of communication means a preference for group discourses (for example, *us*, instead of *I*), passive voices (things *fall*, nobody *throws them*), implicit messages –which implies knowledge of the context–, and a certain aversion to conflict, at least individually (Hofstede, 2015). In addition, given that the region is characterized by a short-term time perspective, in communications there tends to be anxiety about responses (such as multiple *missed* calls; commonplaces in emails, as *I am looking forward to your comments*), a preference for orality and face-to-face meetings, and a certain local view of the issues (Hofstede, 2015).

Another Latin American characteristic would be the greater tolerance to inequality, which in communicational terms would imply a tendency towards respect for authority and social sanction for those who do not respect it (Hofstede, 2015). Likewise, the tendency to avoid uncertainty would explain the preference for accurate and clear messages –structured and with *truths*–, and a selective use of humor.

Geert Hofstede and his team have offered consulting services for years, mainly in matters of organizational culture, based on a series of studies on the culture of countries and its influence on corporate management. Their data on the different nations are freely accessible, and in the case of Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile, they allow us to maintain that their profiles are generally adequate to the characterization of Latin America (figure 2).
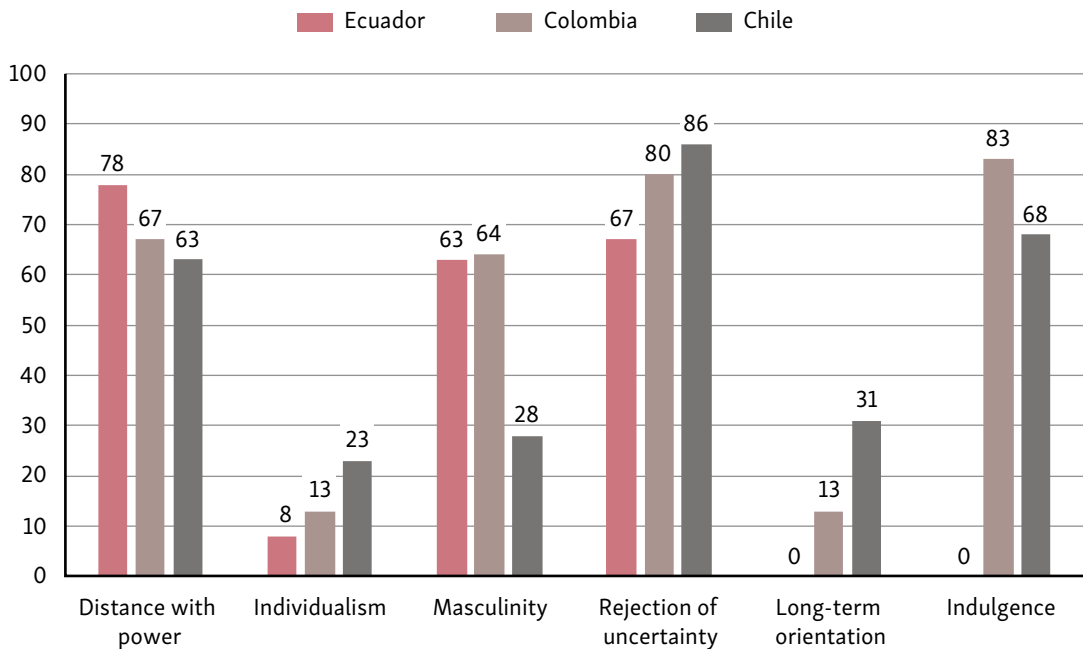
Figure 2. Cultural profiles of Ecuador, Colombia and Chile

Source: Own elaboration based on the data available in Hofstede Insights
(https://www.hofstede-insights.com/country-comparison/chile,colombia,ecuador),
retrieved October 11, 2019.

However, there are some differences between the three countries. The most striking for this study is that Chile, being within Latin American parameters – according to 2019 data–, has a smaller distance from power, is more individualistic, less sexist, and with a greater aversion to uncertainty, which from an institutional point of view would explain, for example, the low rates of corruption and the tendency to formalize processes (Hofstede Insights, n.d.a.).

METHODOLOGY

This article shows part of the results of a larger study on communication practices for sustainability in companies in Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile. As stated, in principle our purpose was to test the effectiveness of the Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model (Durán & Mosquera, 2016a), which had only been tested in Ecuadorian companies (Durán, Mosquera, & Vega, 2017). However, we also aspire to recognize the key variables of efficient communication for sustainability in the Latin American context. It was in this framework that we decided to also consider the potential effect of national cultures and their values. In this regard, this research is exploratory in nature.

This part of the research has a quantitative approach, based on the application of a survey to the companies' directors or managers of communication or corporate

affairs –an instrument published by Durán & Mosquera (2016a)–, in which both the company's sustainability strategy and the communication practices linked to it are assessed. The field work was conducted between May and October 2019.

The sample frame of the study was defined from the 100 largest companies in each country, according to their income and profits, and to the rankings prepared by the business magazines *América Economía* (for the case of Chile), *Dinero* (for Colombia) and *Ekos* (for Ecuador), in 2018. The assumption is that the companies with the highest income are those that have the most resources to carry out CSR and communication management for sustainability, and therefore are ideal candidates to validate the model. Consequently, our intention has not been to obtain representative data from the universe of companies in each country, but only to conduct a casuistic analysis that allows obtaining conclusions about the model developed and recognizing opportunities for future research.

Precisely for this reason, for this article we work with a partial sample of 16 companies per country (48 in total), intentionally choosing the largest (with the highest income) from among those that until the end of July 2019 had validly answered the survey (table 1).

The survey, which was self-administered through the online platform Survio, investigates two dimensions. The first, relative to sustainability, measures five variables: the conceptual line, based on the theoretical sections proposed by Garriga & Melé (2004); the type of collaboration, based on the continuum formulated by Austin & Reficco (2005); planning and resources for social responsibility; planning for environmental preservation, and respect for the rights of others. The section on communications management measures the information flow mechanisms in the company; corporate communication objectives; the strategies used; the profile of the communicator, and the organization's discourse regarding sustainable development. In general, these variables are related to the practices of the four communication models defined by Grunig and Hunt (2000).

Respondents had to distribute 10 points among the options available in each item, giving a higher score to the one(s) that best described the characteristics of their organization. For data processing, we added the scores assigned in the variables of each context, and we calculated averages by country. Given the sample size, we did not consider useful to calculate averages by industry sector.

Finally, the results were interpreted considering the theoretical guidelines of the model and the cultural characteristics of each country, according to Hofstede Insights' criteria and online data.

Ecuador	Colombia	Chile
Azucarera Valdez (Food)	Aditivos y Químicos (Food)	Anglo American (Mining)
Banco Guayaquil S.A. (Finances)	Bancolombia (Finances)	Antofagasta Minerals (Mining)
Banco Pichincha (Finances)	Brinsa (Textile)	Arauco (Forest)
Continental Tire Andina (Industrial)	Cementos Argos (Mining)	BancoEstado (Finances)
Cooperativa Progreso (Finances)	Colcafé (Food)	CGE (Electricity)
Coorporación GPF (Pharmaceutical)	Comfama (Services)	Codelco (Mining)
DHL Express Ecuador (Transport)	Ecopetrol (Mining)	Emp. Copec (Investment)
Difare (Pharmaceutical)	EEPP Medellín (Services)	Emp. Lipigas (Fuel)
Holcim Ecuador (Mining)	Grupo Energía Bogotá (Energy)	ENAP (Fuel)
Int. Food Services (Food)	Grupo Familia (Personal care)	Falabella (Retail)
Nestle Ecuador (Food)	Holasa (Industrial)	General Motors (Automotive)
Pronaca (Food)	Isagen (Energy)	ILC (Finances)
Repsol (Petroleum)	Metro Medellín (Transport)	Masisa (Forest)
Sertecpet (Petroleum)	Súper Alimentos (Food)	Nestlé Chile (Food)
Tesalia (Beverages)	Suramericana (Finances)	Sodimac (Retail)
Unacem (Construction)	TCC (Transport)	Walmart Chile (Retail)

Note: the industrial sector to which the companies belong is indicated in parentheses.

Table 1. Alphabetical list of companies that make up the sample of this study

Source: Own elaboration.

RESULTS

Sustainability contexts

Considering that one of our expectations is to characterize the observation units –organizations, industrial sectors, countries, etc.– based on the convergence between social responsibility strategies and communication practices for sustainability, from the origin of the model (Durán & Mosquera, 2016a) it has been recommended that the results be presented using radar figures.

As explained, the figures correspond to the averages obtained from the scores that each respondent assigned to the options within each item/variable, which in principle allows us to know the perception that the company has of itself concerning the context of sustainability and communication to which it belongs (for example, focused on the common good). In this regard, it is necessary to note that these data only represent a self-diagnosis of the organizations, not an impartial evaluation. Although this could imply the existence of a social desirability bias in the results, it is known that the use of self-administered instruments, such as the online survey, reduces this possibility (Nederhof, 1985).

According to the generic design of the model (Durán et al., 2017), there are four possible primary scenarios for the analysis of the results: *total convergence*, when the two dimensions (CSR and communication) coincide in a context; *dominant convergence*, when both dimensions coincide in one context, but a certain development is also outlined in another; *concentrated divergence*, when each dimension is in a different context, and *scattered divergence*, which occurs when there is no trend in any sense.

From the national data point of view, and despite their partial nature –since they do not represent the complete sample of the study– it is surprising that the same dominant convergence scenario is observed in the three countries (figures 3, 4, and 5). Although there are different degrees of development in sustainability management in them, the figures suggest that large companies tend to be organizations focused on the common good, with a coincidence between the dimensions of sustainability and communication, and a slight emergence of the publics' interest angle.

This means that, at least in the opinion of their directors or corporate communication managers, these organizations do not have as their main purpose the growth of their own businesses. The theory suggests that something like this is possible to the extent that the entrepreneurial work –or the corporate strategy of these companies– is conceived in a complex way, balancing the reasonable economic aspiration with an ideological-ethical framework based on the recognition of universal rights (Torresano, 2012). Likewise, this implies that communication management in these companies resembles –or at least aspires to be– to what Grunig & Hunt (2000) consider a bidirectional symmetric scenario, i.e., characterized by the search and maintenance of horizontal relationships and transparent with stakeholders. It is, in short, a situation very close to the ideal proposed by the Global Compact (Organización de Naciones Unidas, 2014).

This does not mean, nevertheless, that these organizations are necessarily at a higher or optimal stage. The premise of the model is that each context represents the appropriate strategic framework for each organization and its environment at a given time. Therefore, that a company is focused on business or on accountability is not intrinsically good or bad, but the result of its own path. In that regard, this theory is diagnostic, not normative. However, it is true that it implies a certain progression or evolution, since the main promoters of sustainable development, such as Accountability (2015 and 2018) and the Global Reporting Initiative (www.globalreporting.org) state that greater corporate responsibility is based on a complex sustainability strategy and transparent management, including communications.
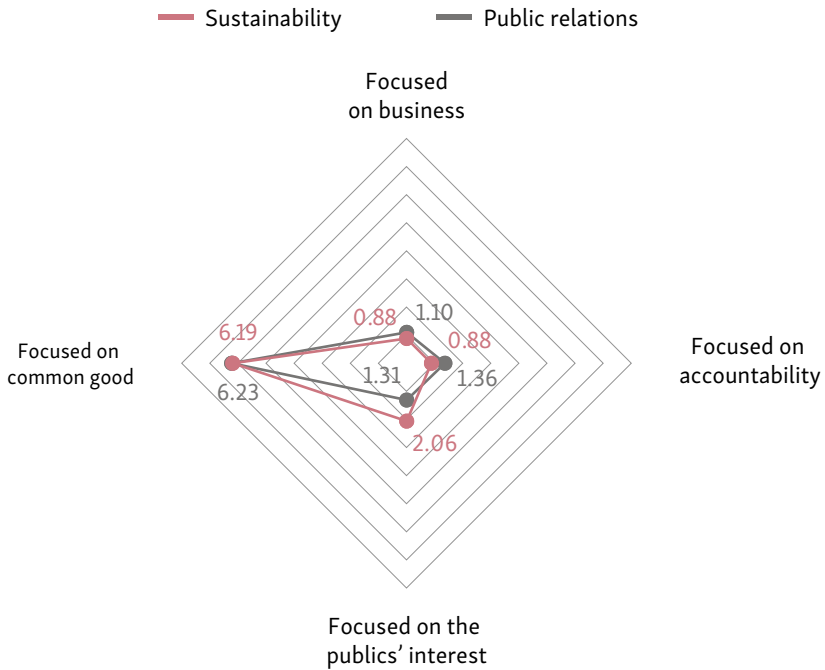
Figure 3. Sustainability and communication context: Ecuador
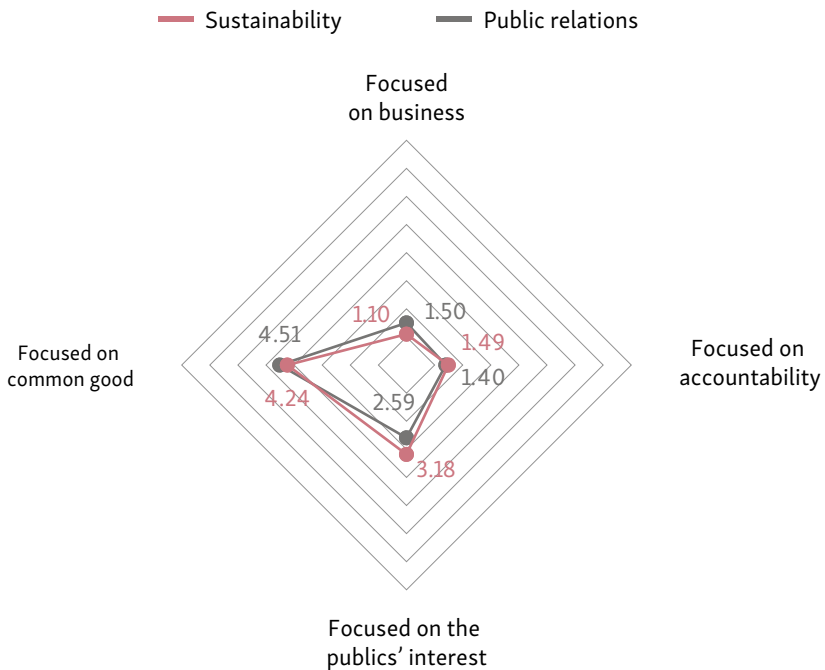
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 4. Sustainability and communication context: Colombia
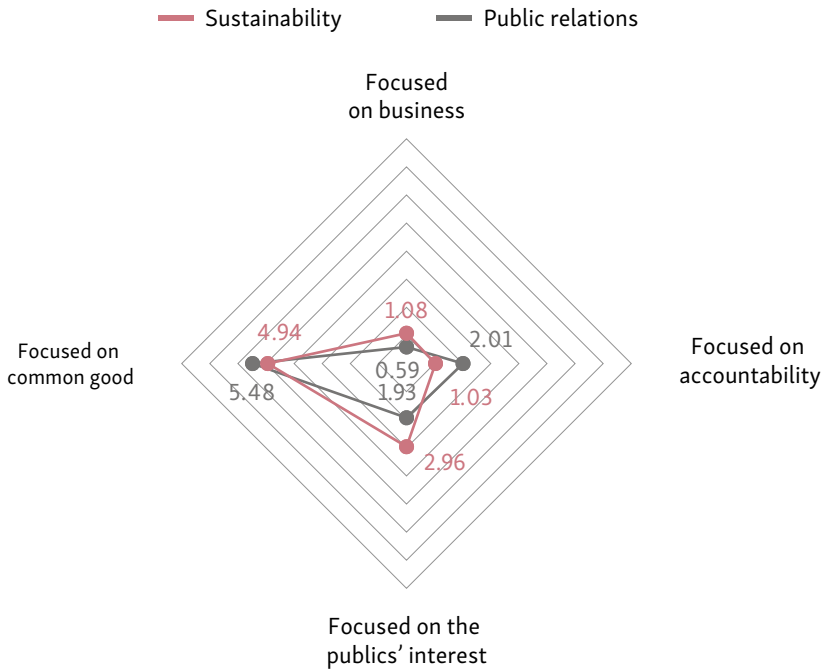
Source: Own elaboration.

Figure 5. Sustainability and communication context: Chile

Source: Own elaboration.

Therefore, it is not contradictory that along with the focus on the common good, the focus on the interests of the publics emerges. This means that the organizations observed also value the recognition of and the connection with their stakeholders. This context dialogues with the framework of integrative theories of sustainability (Garriga & Melé, 2004) and with bidirectional asymmetric public relations (Grunig & Hunt, 2000). According to the data, this orientation is higher in Colombia than in the other countries (3.18 in sustainability and 2.59 in public relations). Chile has more orientation to this context in sustainability (2.96) than in public relations (1.93), while in Ecuador this orientation is low (2.06 in sustainability and in public relations, 1.31), with a higher gap in public relations.

Chile is where the greatest orientation to the context centered on accountability is (1.03 in sustainability and 2.01 in public relations). This includes organizations concerned about public acceptance, which are therefore responsible for the dissemination of information about their actions (Grunig & Hunt, 2000). This perspective is aligned with the political theories of sustainability (Garriga & Melé, 2004), whose axes are the notion of corporate citizenship and the premise that there is an implicit obligation on the part of companies to keep society informed about their activities, especially regarding the environment and social rights. In the case of Colombia, this orientation occurs to a lesser degree (1.49 in sustainability and 1.40 in public relations), without public relations actions having such a wide margin with sustainability practices, as is the case in Chile. Ecuador is the

country with the least orientation to this context (0.88 in sustainability and 1.36 in public relations).

Finally, the aggregated data show that business orientation is quite low in the three countries (Ecuador: 0.88 in sustainability and 1.10 in public relations; Colombia: 1.10 in sustainability and 1.50 in public relations; Chile: 1.08 in sustainability and 0.59 in public relations). This may mean that, from the point of view of the collaboration continuum (Austin & Reficco, 2005), these companies are at a higher level, more complex and bidirectional, as described by Grunig & Hunt (2000). Nevertheless, and as has been suggested, it may also imply that at the time of answering the survey, communication directors or managers do not value or require this type of management, which in certain scenarios (such as crisis management) could be valid.

Influence of national cultures

As stated, one of the underlying hypotheses in this study is that national culture could have some influence on the definitions that companies make of their sustainability and communication contexts. From the data obtained by the surveys and the general characteristics given by the studies by Hofstede and his team, it is possible to recognize some trends that would help to understand the differences between countries.

For example, the fact that the orientation towards accountability is greater in Chile than in Colombia and Ecuador could be explained –at least in part– by the differences between these three countries in terms of distance from power. According to Hofstede's data, in Chile there is a lower tolerance for inequalities, a greater demand regarding civil and individual rights, and a lower respect for traditional hierarchies and authorities. From this standpoint, it seems logical that Chilean organizations seek to keep their stakeholders informed of the practices they conduct and to be increasingly inclusive of communities and public opinion in their decision-making. This same logic could justify the reverse situation that Ecuador experiences.

Likewise, the importance of accountability in Chile, more than in Colombia and Ecuador, can be interpreted as an effect of the cultural inclination for the social-emotional role of femininity, which according to Hofstede implies a preference for cooperation, concern for the weak and their quality of life, as well as the generation of consensus. On the contrary, masculinity is understood as an emphasis on competitiveness and verticality in decision-making, which could explain why Colombian and Ecuadorian companies show a certain inclination towards business orientation, both in public relations actions, as well as sustainability practices.

The second most relevant context of sustainability and communication in the three countries is that of organizations focused on the interests of their publics. The case of Colombia stands out, especially in the dimension of public relations, closely followed by Chile, which could be understood from the importance that the avoidance of uncertainty has for both cultures. This implies, especially in the business field, a preference for the formalization of processes, strategic planning, and the relevance of budgets for management, issues also shown by the surveys' results.

Meanwhile, there may be a correlation between the marked orientation of Ecuadorian companies towards the common good and its cultural tendency to collectivism. Ecuador, in this area, is surpassed worldwide only by Guatemala. Therefore, social expectations regarding organizations, even of the private sector, are very high. And although Chile is not in the range of the most individualistic nations –as is the case with the United States, which according to 2019 data has 91 points in the study (Hofstede Insights, n.d.b.)–, its distance from Ecuador in this area could explain why the orientation of its companies towards the common good is proportionally lower.

Since there is no data for Ecuador in the dimensions of long-term orientation and indulgence, it was preferred not to interpret the survey results from them.

CONCLUSIONS

The research has allowed to test, at least in the first instance, the applicability of the Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model in companies from different countries and realities. Although this exercise is not free of limitations –as stated in the next section– the coherence of the results is already an indicator of its viability, even when expanding its scope to the analysis of the influence of national cultures on the design and the implementation of social responsibility and public relations practices.

The results show a coincidence between the large companies of Ecuador, Colombia, and Chile in the same context of sustainability and communication: that of organizations oriented to the common good, with some development or emphasis in the context of entities focused on the interests of their publics. As has been suggested, this means that these companies seek to balance their economic-financial interests with an ethical approach to the comprehensive development of society. In the context of a public opinion increasingly sensitive to these matters, this implies a greater stage of development of social responsibility and public relations strategies.

Since the model does not have a normative character, but rather a diagnostic one, these results do not necessarily mean that these companies are at a level of excellence, and that therefore they do not need further development or intervention, but that at this moment they are related to their environment –and resolve its contingencies– in this way. This apparently subtle difference is fundamental: the Contexts of Sustainability and Communication Convergence Model does not seek to say what organizations should be like, but rather to help them understand their current situation and recognize desirable or risky alternative scenarios, which depend on the conditions of the environment.

To investigate the reliability of the data –especially considering that this is the first advance of results–, these were contrasted with the cultural profiles of each country prepared by Hofstede Insights. The expectation was to have parameters that would allow us to better judge the differences between nations. This goal was met: just as the marked orientation of Ecuadorian companies towards the common good can be explained by their cultural tendency towards collectivism, the orientation of Chilean organizations towards accountability can be understood by the cultural tendency to distance themselves from power. Therefore, although it is necessary to delve into these correlations, it is possible to suggest that they exist.

DISCUSSION

From this assessment of the research process and its partial results, it is possible to notice certain limitations of the study and opportunities for future projects.

First, the size of the sample (48 organizations, 16 per country) makes it impossible to extrapolate the results to the universe of companies in each country, and even to the sampling frame. This condition does not allow us to offer conclusions about the industrial sectors or to recognize similarities and differences in the same sector between the three countries. However, this can be resolved by working with a larger sample. Similarly, with a larger sample, the analysis of the influence of national cultures could be corroborated or even enriched, given the greater diversity of companies.

Second, the fact that the data comes from a survey of the communication directors or managers of the companies limits the results to a self-assessment of the current state of the organizations, with the possible risk that these judgments are contaminated by the expectations regarding the company and its strategies. In other words, an executive –especially one who is responsible for the company's image and corporate reputation– is likely to respond by thinking about what the organization wants to be, not what it really is. To limit this bias, it would

be necessary to include the opinions of stakeholders (for example, customers or suppliers), or even conduct a cross evaluation, by industrial sector (that companies in the same field give their opinion on the performance of others, and then contrast those). However, this risk can be reduced or limited thanks to the data obtained in the in-depth interviews, planned for the second stage of the project.

Third, that the application of the survey through a web platform increases the risks of a low response rate and that the questionnaire will be answered by another person (Bryman, 2012). Nevertheless, this problem has been controlled by formalizing the contact process with the subjects, which meets the standard ethical requirements for research (for example, an informed consent letter). Furthermore, it is considered that this is a justifiable risk, considering that the application of a self-administered instrument reduces the social desirability bias (Nederhof, 1985).

However, given that this project's objective is to test a method for the diagnosis of sustainability and communication strategies in organizations, which implies an exercise in constant review, we hope that future research can complement this effort and correct any limitations. For example, a study that considers the companies' culture and their similarity or difference with the national profile already seen, and the impact of this eventual gap on the convergence between sustainability and communication; a cross between the quantitative data presented and other qualitative data (from interviews with executives or managers), which allows an in-depth description of the narratives and arguments that support the companies' communication strategies, or an analysis of the corporate discourses developed in each case (such as reports, websites, social media, advertising, etc.), to observe how the convergence between sustainability and communication is manifested.

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