

Use of the corporate media ecosystem to build trust under high-uncertainty conditions: a review of the energy sector in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador¹

Utilización del ecosistema de medios corporativos para generar confianza en condiciones de alta incertidumbre: una revisión del sector energético en Chile, Colombia y Ecuador

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Received on: 30/07/2024 **Revised on:** 12/09/2024 **Accepted on:** 28/10/2024 **Published on:** 01/03/2025

Suggested citation: Orozco-Toro, J. A., Retamal-Ferrada, L., Vega, M. and Avila, C. (2025). Use of the corporate media ecosystem to build trust under high-uncertainty conditions: a review of the energy sector in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador. *Universitas XXI*, 42, pp. 233-255. <https://doi.org/10.17163/uni.n42.2025.10>

Abstract

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the corporate sector showed interest not only in ensuring business continuity but also in effectively communicating risks to shape behaviors and foster trust, despite the prevalence of “infoxication” among key stakeholders. This study examines the role of corporations as formal sources of information alongside traditional media outlets during a health crisis that, from a communication perspective, has been categorized as an infodemic within a rapidly evolving media ecosystem. Through semi-structured interviews and an in-depth analysis of sustainability reports from three energy companies in Chile, Colombia, and Ecuador, this research identifies the strategies, narratives, and communication tools employed to navigate the crisis. Findings indicate that, in their efforts to protect workers’ health and enhance institutional reputation, these companies exhibited remarkable adaptability in leveraging various communication tools and channels to craft narratives that engendered trust among stakeholders. Despite high levels of uncertainty, the companies successfully structured an efficient media ecosystem to complement stakeholders’ information consumption patterns. This perspective constitutes the study’s primary contribution, as it highlights how, within the context of COVID-19, corporate discourse was strategically designed to build trust and encourage behavioral changes among employees and their families regarding preventive measures. In this regard, the corporate media ecosystem, through the deliberate construction of trust narratives, emerges as a fundamental component of stakeholders’ communication frameworks and a crucial mechanism for counteracting misinformation, including “infoxication”.

Keywords

Risk communication, media ecosystem, corporate discourse, strategic communications, COVID-19.

Resumen

Durante la pandemia de COVID-19, el sector corporativo mostró un interés significativo no solo en la continuidad del negocio, sino también en la necesidad de reforzar la confianza a través de la comunicación de riesgos de manera que permite modificar comportamientos a pesar de los altos niveles de “infoxicación” entre los principales interesados. Este estudio arroja luz sobre el papel asumido por las empresas como fuentes formales de noticias junto con los medios de comunicación tradicionales durante una emergencia sanitaria que, desde una perspectiva comunicacional, ha sido categorizada como una infodemia dentro de un ecosistema de medios emergentes. El estudio identificó estrategias, narrativas y herramientas empleadas por tres empresas energéticas en Chile, Colombia y Ecuador a través de entrevistas semiestructuradas y un análisis en profundidad de sus informes de sostenibilidad. Se encontró que, en sus esfuerzos por proteger la salud de los trabajadores y fortalecer las reputaciones institucionales, las empresas demostraron una alta adaptabilidad en su uso de herramientas y canales para construir narrativas que inspiraran confianza entre los interesados. A pesar de los altos niveles de incertidumbre, las empresas configuraron un ecosistema de medios eficiente para complementar la dieta comunicacional de los interesados. Esta perspectiva es la principal contribución de este estudio, dado que, en el contexto de COVID-19, el discurso corporativo estaba orientado a inspirar confianza y modificar comportamientos entre los trabajadores y sus familias respecto a las medidas preventivas. En este sentido, el ecosistema de medios corporativo, bajo la construcción de una narrativa de confianza, es un componente adicional de la dieta comunicacional de los interesados y un ingrediente vital para contrarrestar la desinformación.

Palabras clave

Comunicación de riesgos, ecosistema mediático, discurso corporativo, comunicación estratégica, COVID-19.

Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic presented a huge challenge due to its profound impacts on health, in the social, economic and communication areas (ECLAC, 2022; Barrutia *et al.*, 2021; García-Madurga *et al.*, 2021; Miles *et al.*, 2020; WHO, 2020). In Latin America, the uncertainty showed the great inequalities and highlighted the fragility and structural weaknesses of state institutions. These vulnerabilities increased by cultural factors that hindered an effective and safe response to the crisis (Cárdenas Ruiz and Pineda Rodríguez, 2021). The media, traditionally responsible for guiding and educating the public, struggled to fulfill their role due to the large volume of digital content, which lacked adequate fact-checking. This scenario led to an overabundance of information, thus generating a serious threat to public health (Briceño-Romero *et al.*, 2023; Gonçalves *et al.*, 2022; Heydari *et al.*, 2021; WHO, 2020; Valenti *et al.*, 2022, Zarocostas, 2020).

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), an epidemic occurs when excessive inflows of information – partly false or misleading – arise during an outbreak of disease. This phenomenon fosters uncertainty, erodes trust in health authorities and encourages behavior that endangers public health (WHO, 2018). Faced with these risks, it is necessary to examine how corporations informed their employees through various communication channels to protect public health while ensuring the uninterrupted supply of energy, which is an essential service for communities.

This study aligns with Beck's Risk Society (2007) framework, which states that while risk has been an inherent aspect of human existence since the dawn of civilization, contemporary society is uniquely defined by the omnipresence of risk that knows no borders (Beck, 2007; García and Goycolea, 2021; Zunino, 2021; UNDRR, 2017, cited by Liberona Durán *et al.*, 2021).

This study, which was conducted between May 2021 and May 2022, employs an integrated approach that links the directives of the WHO and the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) with the corporate communication strategies implemented by companies to implement risk communication measures through their corporate media ecosystems. These efforts complemented the consumption of information from employees and their families regarding virus containment measures, including the use of masks, social distancing, and hand hygiene. In this context, this research highlights the role of corporations as formal sources of information, complementing traditional media

during a health crisis that, from a communicative perspective, has been classified as an infodemic within an emerging media ecosystem.

Study approach and research questions

Electricity demand can serve as an indicator of the socioeconomic impact of a pandemic within a country, as it reflects reductions in levels of industrial consumption (Sánchez Úbeda *et al.*, 2021). As an essential service, the energy sector deserves careful analysis because of the challenges associated with maintaining system operations amid high uncertainty, fluctuating consumption patterns, and economic disruptions. In this framework, this study aims to analyze the risk communication strategies implemented by energy companies in Chile, Colombia and Ecuador during the COVID-19 pandemic. To this end, the following research questions were asked:

- What risk communication strategies were deployed by the energy companies examined during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What are the characteristics of the narrative language used by these companies during the Covid-19 pandemic?
- What channels or tools were used to communicate risks to recipients during the pandemic?

Risk is inherent in the day-to-day operations of companies and can manifest itself in various ways, many of which cannot be eliminated (Rodríguez López *et al.*, 2013). The analysis of risk management in an organizational context would be incomplete without examining how risk is communicated. This perspective is the main contribution of the study, as corporate discourse during the COVID-19 crisis was strategically designed to instill trust and influence behavior change among workers and their families in relation to preventive measures. In this regard, the corporate media ecosystem emerges, by building a trust-based narrative, as a key component of stakeholder communication frameworks and a mechanism to counter disinformation, including info-toxication.

Risk Communication

Risk communication, in its theoretical and practical evolution, has been shaped by various theories, models and approaches of disciplines such as

sociology, psychology, economics and social education, among others (Gómez Castro, 2017). It is an emerging and interdisciplinary field of research and practice (Balog-Way *et al.*, 2020; Glik, 2007) that has been developed in response to the need for specialized information oriented to prevention during crises, disasters and public health emergencies (Farré Coma, 2005; Berg *et al.*, 2021). From this perspective, risk communication can be analyzed across multiple disciplines, including disaster management, environmental risk communication, crisis communication, and health communication and promotion. This study incorporates key elements of media communication (information to the public), crisis management (proactive action before and after crises) and communication and health promotion (preventive measures).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines risk communication as the exchange of information and guidance among experts on situations classified as high-risk, making it a critical component of emergency response efforts (Risk Communication, 2023). When implemented effectively, risk communication facilitates the use of appropriate measures in crisis situations, such as natural disasters and disease outbreaks, while increasing confidence in official guidelines issued by authorities. Therefore, its main objectives include the modification of risk mitigation behaviors (Cárdenas Ruiz and Pineda Rodríguez, 2021; Fischhoff, 2020) and the configuration of risk perception and assessment (Covello and Sandman, 2001; Sandman, 2003; Slovic and Peters, 2006; Stajnovic, 2015), which ultimately helps prevent threats (Porat *et al.*, 2020; Prior, 2020; Zhang *et al.*, 2020).

According to Gallardo-Paúl (2021), pandemics pose a unique risk communication challenge, as the dissemination of information reaches a wide public that includes people who may not be perceived as at risk. Moreover, public alarm can sometimes be as contagious as the disease itself, leading to disruptions that hinder the effectiveness and clarity of communication efforts.

A review of the specialized literature indicates that research on risk communication has expanded significantly in recent decades (Goerlandt *et al.*, 2020; Berg *et al.*, 2021; Ortiz Núñez and Stable Rodríguez, 2021; Betsch, 2020). This growing volume of work, along with contributions from traditional media (e.g. Mauri-Ríos *et al.*, 2020; Lázaro-Rodríguez, and Herrera-Viedma, 2020) and different social media platforms (Cárdenas Ruiz and Pineda Rodríguez, 2021; Chen *et al.*, 2024; Márquez Domínguez *et al.*, 2021; Sutton and Veil, 2017), highlights the complexity of risk communication between government institutions, health organizations, the media and the general pu-

blic. In an evolving and ethically demanding media ecosystem, the effective dissemination of risk-related information remains being a key challenge.

Risk communication strategies

The development of risk communication strategies is defined as “the platform from which activities are defined, planned and prepared for each stage of an emergency that impacts public health” (PAHO, 2011, p.1). A well-structured risk communication strategy is needed to minimize the impact on health at any stage of an emergency or disaster. According to Porat *et al.* (2020), communication strategies should be adapted to cultural norms, values and contextual factors. As a result, a culture of medical autonomy that is effective in a country may require external regulation or legislation.

The risk communication model developed by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) under the International Health Regulations (IHR) comprises five phases: preparedness, initiation of the public health event, control, recovery and evaluation.

The first stage of preparation is to establish a basis for building trust between the public and the authorities. Key actions include the creation of a risk and crisis communication team, internal and interagency coordination, the development of a crisis communication plan, internal and external training for various audiences, the creation of messages and dissemination formats for preparedness, response and recovery, communication monitoring and management of media plans and resources.

The second phase begins at the beginning of the event or crisis, during which an operations, emergency or crisis committee is activated (Fink, 1986; Saura, 2005; Sánchez-Calero, 2012; Verazzi *et al.*, 2021). This unity is essential to manage both an internal and an external crisis. One of the main responsibilities of a crisis committee is to select spokespersons who can communicate not only clearly and transparently, but also with empathy, compassion and solidarity. In addition, they must be experts in non-verbal communication (Gutiérrez Blanco, 2011; PAHO, 2011). During this phase, simple, credible, verifiable, consistent and timely information needs to be provided (Calleja-Reina *et al.*, 2018; Ortiz Núñez and Stable Rodríguez, 2021) through reliable sources, due to the high demand for information (Généreux *et al.*, 2021) in a climate of uncertainty, fear and skepticism during a health emergency. In this context, public trust in government officials is a determining factor for

effective risk communication (Böl, 2016; Gallardo-Paúls, 2021). As Gómez Castro (2017) states, “Trust guarantees the credibility of the messages disseminated by the national authorities” (p. 3390). Transparency is also essential, ensuring the delivery of complete, timely and accurate information on the actual and potential risks associated with the outbreak and its containment (WHO, 2008). During the control phase, the target population becomes more receptive, providing an opportunity to correct rumors and misinformation. At this stage, the main objective of risk communication is to help stakeholders better understand their personal risk levels, enabling them to make informed and timely decisions. Effective risk communication depends on both credible sources and an open and honest dialog. As Moreno and Peres (2020) emphasize, “experts must be active participants in this process, as they convey a sense of calm to the population” (Moreno and Peres, 2020, p.8).

The recovery phase requires the continuous dissemination of accurate messages to stakeholders, particularly vulnerable populations, to encourage adherence to health recommendations. This phase also assesses responses to risk communication activities, and identifies and addresses gaps to improve future crisis management. Finally, during the evaluation phase, the effectiveness of each strategic component is assessed, providing guidance for future crisis situations (Coombs, 2008).

Throughout all the phases previously discussed, it is necessary to consider the dimensions of the discourse, especially the characteristics of the senders and receivers (psychological approach) and the medium or channel used (communicative approach), when developing and implementing a communication strategy. Nespereira (2022) states that “it is necessary to adopt an approach that considers the process of social construction of the concept of risk, the importance of language, arguments or the different narratives that shape this process” (p. 65). In addition, the author identifies three key elements in health crises that contribute significantly to this social construction: the precautionary principle, the principle of authority and the coexistence of multiple narratives that converge to explain the same phenomenon.

The language used to describe a health crisis plays a crucial role in shaping public perceptions, particularly through conceptual metaphors (Ibarretxe-Antuñano, 2012; Villa, 2018). These metaphors often frame an epidemic as an invasion or attack (Rocamora *et al.*, 2022) and epidemiological control policies as a war (Nespereira, 2014; 2022). According to Rojas *et al.* (2020), the COVID-19 crisis led to the widespread use of war metaphors, including

the state of war, the ruthless enemy and health heroes in government and media discourse, reinforcing narratives and militarized values (Cuenca, 2020; Lovón Cueva *et al.*, 2021). However, Rojas *et al.* (2020) warn that “This military logic has set aside the fundamental values in health care associated with the duty of care and collective action” (p. 710). Similarly, Sabucedo *et al.* (2020) argue that war metaphors disrupt social behavior, undermine democratic processes, and reduce empathy and mutual care. Given these concerns, a narrative that fosters clarity and trust and mitigates uncertainty during a health emergency must be constructed.

Communication channels

Any communication strategy should define the channels used to disseminate information, as they serve to convey messages with specific objectives (Heydari *et al.*, 2021; WHO, 2017; Valenti *et al.*, 2021; Zunino, 2021). Therefore, the selection of communication channels is a fundamental component of strategic planning, since it guarantees an effective commitment with the target interest groups (Gutiérrez Blanco, 2011; Moreno and Peres, 2011; Karbaum-Padilla, 2022).

The public is informed about health risks through a wide range of channels and sources of communication. This information consists not only of newspapers, television, print media, government websites, scientific journals, radio and official government messages, but also of interpersonal and informal sources, including friends, family, health professionals and social media (Lin *et al.*, 2014; Gesser-Edelsburg *et al.*, 2020; Suau-Gomilla *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, people are not merely passive recipients of health risk information, but actively interpret and respond to information-based messages from multiple communication channels, sources and health authorities (Berg *et al.*, 2021).

Organizations have become primary sources of information, ensuring that their employees are informed and are able to perform their duties. As a result, internal crisis communication strategies are activated and adjusted as needed. This requires secure and efficient internal communication channels and good physical and wireless networks that provide secure, stable and fast responses (Xifra, 2020, p. 7).

Managing risk communication within an organization involves a number of variables. However, strategies should remain adaptable, as they should be

reviewed in response to changing circumstances. This requires continual adjustments to messages, channels, narratives, and tactics, among other factors.

Methodology

This qualitative, descriptive study followed a phenomenological design, incorporating interviews and documentary analysis. The study sample has been taken from organizations included in a larger study on large companies in Latin America (Colombia, Ecuador and Chile) with well-documented practices in strategic communication and sustainability (Durán *et al.*, 2021). Three energy companies were selected from this group, one from each country, based on the following criteria: (1) they must publish a 2021 sustainability report in a downloadable format that meets Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) standards, and (2) agree to participate in an in-depth interview with their communications managers. In addition, the selection was carried out on the idea that the socioeconomic conditions of each country correlate with fluctuations in electricity demand; that both the public and stakeholders expect greater transparency regarding sustainability activities; and that large energy companies have greater resources to plan and implement risk communication strategies (Sánchez Úbeda *et al.*, 2021; Cota, 2023).

The sustainability reports of each company were analyzed using content analysis techniques. For the interviews, the authors developed a questionnaire based on the Convergence Model for Communication and Sustainability of Durán and Mosquera (2016), which identifies best practices in strategic communication and sustainability, especially in risk and crisis contexts such as the COVID-19 pandemic. In addition to exploring sustainability perspectives and efforts to plan and allocate community resources, the interview questions focused on describing the company's practices related to communication goals, strategies, and information flow.

Each interview lasted approximately 45 minutes and was conducted in Spanish via Zoom between May 2021 and February 2022. Interviews were manually transcribed, and data processed using NVivo software in the following analytical categories: risk communication strategies and plans, constructed narratives, and communication tools used during the pandemic.

Results

The information obtained from the interviews, crossed with the content analysis of the sustainability reports, was classified and analyzed according to three categories: risk communication strategies and plans, constructed narratives and communication tools used during the pandemic.

Risk communication strategies

In interviews with communication professionals from electrical companies in Ecuador, Colombia and Chile, one of the first reflections was the decision to maintain continuity in existing communication strategies with various actors. One interviewee underscored the critical role of risk communication: “I would say that plans are useful, but of course, they had to be adjusted because a plan is one thing and real life is another... but they were useful because we were able to keep them.” (Coordinator, Corporate Relations, Isagen).

Regarding the continuity of risk communication plans, the representatives of Colbún (Chile) acknowledged that although multiple scenarios had been considered, the magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis had been unforeseen: “When you work in a company, you have a risk map... I don’t think this was on any risk map in any company; these things involve great learning” (Communications Manager, Colbún). At CELEC in Ecuador, these strategies laid the groundwork for future planning:

We have always worked on emergency and contingency plans, and they were useful as a starting point for creating health protocols along with health personnel, occupational safety personnel, brigades and subcontractors, among others, who were part of the contingency plan implemented. (Communications Director, CELEC)

Companies had well-structured plans that allowed them to ensure business continuity, sustain policies, and sustain strategic initiatives. Another key aspect was the commitment of companies to strengthen their corporate image and foster trust. As they navigated the health emergency, communication professionals also prioritized maintaining public trust in their institutions:

For us, the main goal was to maintain trust with stakeholder groups. This is our overarching goal, as it was not introduced solely because of the pande-

mic; rather, the goal has always been to ensure continued trust, especially in times of uncertainty. (Coordinator, Corporate Relations, Isagen)

The goal of these activities was to inform before rumors spread, to give accurate and detailed information and to convey confidence and security to strengthen our corporate image. (Communications Director, CELEC)

Maintaining trust in the organization was not only a matter of corporate image and reputation; risk communication plans and strategies also required complementary elements, such as feedback mechanisms and communication approaches tailored to different stakeholders, including employees.

The strategies implemented were designed to protect the image of the company, while preserving relationships with stakeholders and ensuring transparent and continuous communication. In a framework of trust, these measures were aimed at safeguarding the health and safety of workers and their families.

Risk Communication Narratives

Isagen's narrative strategies had a simpler and less schematic communication.

It is about moving away from technical language and considering what the other person expects, feels or perceives because, from a technical point of view, it may be one thing, but their concerns may lie elsewhere (Coordinator, Corporate Relations, Isagen)

From this perspective, it was necessary to adopt a communication approach that moved away from technical language and took into account the cognitive abilities of the various stakeholders. "A brief, clear and concise document that details exactly the steps to follow in an unexpected situation" (Director of Communications, CELEC).

In this context, protocol sharing served two key purposes: raising awareness of standards and maintaining trust among stakeholders, particularly employees. "With this idea of maintaining trust with key interest groups, we set out to explain the protocols to them ... because if there is trust and spaces for dialogue, then there are solutions" (coordinator, Corporate Relations, Isagen). Similarly, the Isagen Sustainability Report highlighted the importance of communication and operational continuity: "We maintained our level

of communication and interaction without compromising the health of our customers or our team, and managed customer emergencies 24 hours a day, 365 days a year” (Sustainability Report, Isagen, p. 11).

A defining aspect of companies’ narrative strategies was their dual purpose: adherence to pandemic-prevention protocols and strengthening firms’ trust and reputation among key stakeholders. CELEC’s Communications Director in Ecuador emphasized this approach:

The reference speech at CELEC, both before and after the pandemic, focused on positioning the company as an institution that ensures trust and continuity in the generation and transmission of energy, as well as the development of new business projects and initiatives of corporate social responsibility and environmental policy. The goal of these efforts was to inform before rumors could spread, ensuring greater accuracy and detail while fostering trust and security to strengthen the company’s corporate image.

Finally, the companies’ reports state that health and safety measures are equally essential to ensure the uninterrupted supply of energy, which is an indispensable service. Companies also underscore their commitment to maintaining power generation and transmission, even amid the health crisis and operational challenges posed by the pandemic.

Risk communication channels and tools

For the energy companies studied, the communication channels and tools used as part of their risk management strategies became as critical as their strategic and narrative actions. They focused their efforts on adapting existing media and channels, temporarily assuming the role of content creators and producing quality information compared to that of mainstream media in their respective countries.

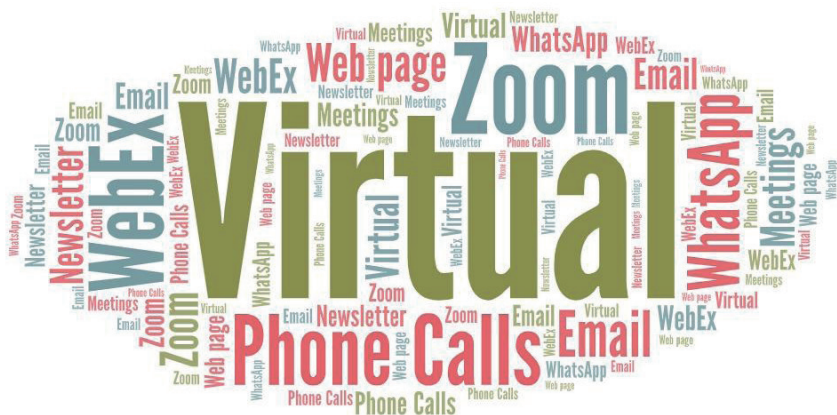
Companies also adapted their communication channels to incorporate the technological advances needed at the time, supported by information and communication technologies (ICT). In Colbún’s case, they kept their radio segments on social media, reusing them as podcasts to reach wider audiences. “We conduct communication campaigns and webinars to keep workers informed of new recommendations and instructions” (Sustainability Report, Colbún, p. 106).

The transition from risk communication to crisis communication required two key adaptations: the shift to virtual platforms and more frequent engagement with stakeholders. Face-to-face meetings were replaced by virtual meetings through platforms such as Webex, Zoom and Teams. In particular, the three companies showed a great deal of adaptation to the new circumstances. They not only optimized their existing channels, but also created new communication platforms. In the case of Colbún in Chile, one of its most significant innovations was the launch of a new medium:

We develop radio programs on local stations in all the communities where we operate. These broadcasts were used to deliver prevention messages and featured specialists sharing best practices with the public, covering topics ranging from basic health information to mental well-being. (Communications Manager, Columbus)

This conclusion is essential as it illustrates how these companies evolved into content creators and, in some cases, media, driven by their commitment to protecting employees and key stakeholders. These actions were essential to build public trust, as companies provided a critical service to the community. This media transformation was reinforced by the need to leverage several virtual platforms (see Figure 1).

Figure 1
Communication Channels and Tools



There were several tools and channels used by companies, and they were managed in a virtual framework adapted to the needs of their various stakeholders. At CELEC in Ecuador, each tool served a different purpose:

Phone and virtual interviews with media to share company actions... planned social media activations, including memes and tweets; planned social media activations, including memes and tweets... communication materials for social media and WhatsApp to promote corporate initiatives... the creation of engaging graphic content and videos to inform audiences... the launch of a new radio station... and information bulletins to keep the media informed and prevent the spread of false information. (Communications Director, CELEC)

This range of communication tools allowed companies to reach a wider audience and deliver a higher volume of messages. In particular, WhatsApp emerged as a key communication channel, despite not being part of the companies' pre-established communication strategies to maintain close contact with stakeholders, especially employees: "We confirmed that WhatsApp was an effective medium ... distribution groups were created to send messages quickly and directly to internal audiences and communities within our areas of influence" (Director of Communications, CELEC).

WhatsApp entered the scene... although it was the least corporate channel, it proved to be useful at certain times. Although informally, each department had a group, including management. We used WhatsApp as a lifeline, particularly at the beginning of the pandemic, and it was very effective in maintaining communication with workers and communities. (Coordinator, Corporate Relations, Isagen)

Although WhatsApp had not previously been incorporated into companies' risk communication plans, it became an essential channel during the pandemic, demonstrating its adaptability and effectiveness in crisis communication.

Discussion and conclusions

During the pandemic, strategic communication in companies in Latin America faced several challenges due to the social, political and economic

complexities of the region (Álvarez-Nobell *et al.*, 2022). Within the media ecosystem, public risk perception should be understood not only to strengthen risk communication strategies but also to support and complement public health efforts during endemic, epidemic or pandemic scenarios. In addition, multiple entities involved at various levels within a company should be considered, beyond direct employees, including subcontractors, suppliers and their families.

As for the first research question on risk communication strategies deployed during the pandemic, the results indicate that risk communication plans designed for hypothetical scenarios often require significant adaptation in response to unprecedented crises such as a pandemic. Business continuity became a priority of the companies' communication strategies. Although companies had risk management plans in place, most strategic risk efforts were quickly shifted to crisis management through the activation of crisis committees or emergency operations committees, recognizing that suspension of operations was not an option.

Despite the different political, cultural, economic and social conditions in the three countries studied, similarities were observed in the types of media used, the stakeholders concerned, and the narrative strategies used. Businesses successfully translated pre-defined strategic plans into concrete crisis management actions.

The second research question examined the narrative language used by energy companies to address emerging challenges. Common guidelines included a preference for clear, non-technical communication, a greater emphasis on dialog with stakeholders, and a focus on prevention messages. In particular, corporate narratives served a dual purpose: while the company's leaders adhered to pandemic-prevention protocols, they also worked to improve their corporate image and strengthen trust among key stakeholders.

As companies adapted their risk communication plans and developed narratives, their main concerns focused on ensuring the continuity of an essential service (electricity), safeguarding employee health, and strengthening corporate reputation. These goals were achieved through continuous dialogue and collaboration with reliable sources, such as health professionals, to obtain reliable data on health and prevention and to build trust among stakeholders. Due to the growing volume of information and disinformation during the epidemic, companies strategically positioned them-

selves as trusted voices alongside traditional media through the use of specific tools and narratives.

The third research question sought to identify the channels and tools that electrical companies used to reach their audiences during the pandemic. The three companies leveraged traditional media and adapted their approaches based on changing circumstances, necessary narratives, and corporate objectives. One significant finding was that corporate communication departments not only acted as intermediaries, but also assumed the role of content creators, effectively functioning as media outlets. This was seen in their collaborations with traditional media to develop radio programs, visual materials and other content designed not only to inform but also to combat disinformation during the epidemic. In this sense, corporate communication channels became main components of the media ecosystem and the stakeholder information landscape.

Although none of the companies had previously considered WhatsApp a viable communication channel due to its primarily personal use, they quickly recognized its potential as an effective tool to build trust and enable instant, two-way communication with stakeholders. These findings suggest that the choice of communication channel is less critical than the way it is used. The effectiveness of a given media depends on the application of well-designed strategies and descriptions tailored to the specific context.

The experiences of communications managers reinforce the notion that risk communication is needed in any organization and that adaptability is key to its success. Therefore, companies must continually evaluate their strategic communication efforts, refining their processes to transform risk communication plans into structured guidelines that describe best practices for crisis management. But it is equally important to recognize that each crisis is unique and requires a tailored approach.

Finally, governments, public institutions, the media, and businesses must strengthen collaboration by using accurate language and credible sources to effectively influence stakeholder behavior during health emergencies and other disasters in which prevention is critical to risk mitigation.

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Note

- 1 This study is part of the research project entitled “Convergence between strategic communications and sustainability and management of best practices in a post-pandemic scenario. Empirical study in companies from Ecuador, Chile and Colombia.” Funded by the Universidad del Azuay (Ecuador), the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana (Colombia) and the Universidad Católica de la Santísima Concepción (Chile), with the coordination of the Research Group on Applied Communications of the Universidad del Azuay and the Epilión Research Group of the Universidad Pontificia Bolivariana.

Declaration of Authorship - Taxonomy CRediT	
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Jaime Alberto Orozco-Toro	Conceptualization, data curation and formal analysis.
Lorena Retamal-Ferrada	Validation, visualization and writing - original.
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Caroline Avila	Acquisition of funding, methodology, review and editing.