

Legacy of the Reactivation: Communication and Media at the Service of the Business Movement and Resilience to the COVID-19 Pandemic in Spain



Fernando Olivares-Delgado  and María Teresa Benlloch-Osuna 

Abstract It is interesting to share an initiative that we consider relevant from a business and social point of view. It is a business “activism” movement that emerged on the first day of the lockdown decreed in Spain in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The movement was structured in several phases: the initial phase, *Esto no tiene que parar*; the intermediate phase, *Actíivate*; and the final phase, *Legacy of the Reactivation*. This text describes how an entrepreneurial initiative that arose almost spontaneously, in a context of unprecedented uncertainty and lack of information, such as that experienced during the initial phase of the pandemic, evolved into a powerful tool for business and social resilience in Spain. Through the analysis of a case study, the role of communication management for the activation of projects is mainly detailed. The results lead to affirm that strategic communication and the activation of the appropriate media and supports, mainly textual and audiovisual social networks, were decisive for the success of the project. *Legacy of the Reactivation* represents the beginning of a new era in which companies are called upon to act with determination, through the allocation of economic and intangible resources, to seek the solution to the great global challenges, in the exercise of the role that corresponds to them. One of the main conclusions is that the pandemic has also been, despite everything, an opportunity to reshape trust in the business world and its legitimacy for the future.

Keywords Strategic communication · Business movement · Covid-19 · Crisis communication · Corporate social responsibility

F. Olivares-Delgado (✉)
University of Alicante, 03690 Alicante, Spain
e-mail: f.olivares@ua.es

M. T. Benlloch-Osuna
Jaume I University, Castellón, Spain
e-mail: benlloch@uji.es

1 Introduction

In this space, it is interesting to share an experience with the rest of the world which we consider unheard of until now: a business movement emerging on the first day of the strict confinement declared in Spain as a response to the COVID-19 pandemic. This paper tells the story of how an unplanned business initiative, arising from the general lack of information about an uncertain and unprecedented situation such as that experienced during the initial phase of confinement due to a pandemic, led to a powerful tool for the resilience of a whole country. It is also an intangible resource of incalculable value for managing learning and current and future social innovation. The symbolic value lies in the leadership and influence of those who did not hesitate to share their actions, learning, concerns, visions and confidence in Spanish society as a whole.

On 14 March 2020, Spain declared a state of emergency due to COVID-19, which entailed the confinement of the whole population. On the same day, 200 business-people, employees, entrepreneurs, freelancers and professionals from diverse production sectors and business sizes from all over Spain decided not to stop so that the wheels of the Spanish economy would keep turning. Essential sectors and services in Spain showed a high capacity for resilience [16]. Resilience, applied to mental health [9] (Bonnano et al. 2009), is the ability to overcome adversity. Supply chains in Spain remained active and there were no shortages of essential products in shops. Supply chains in Spain remained active and there were no shortages of basic necessities in shops, according to the main associations of the sector, such as AECOC and ASEDAS, and the different Ministries.

The important role of the “essential” sectors has been one of the key elements for the country’s productivity. 51.2% of Spanish companies maintained face-to-face work during the state of alarm, according to the report *The Future of Work post-COVID-19* [1]. As global consultancy The Addeco Group Foundation states in its study *The Future of Work post-COVID*, “business leaders, governments and workers must seek to better understand each other’s labour market needs to jointly develop inclusive policies and innovative human-centred solutions to enhance the seamless transformation of the workforce towards a post-pandemic economy”.

2 Spanish Business Leaders, United Around One Idea: #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP

#ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP was the hashtag acting as a link to clearly communicate its purpose. The movement also sought to publicly recognise the work of business people, employees, entrepreneurs and freelancers. The companies of #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP continued working and partially prevented the collapse of the Spanish economy, as well as enabling its quick recovery. After 2 months, the community consisted of over 3,000 companies from various production sectors, representing

over 4% of GDP and over 1 million jobs. The main objective of #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP, in the words of Paula Llop (*coordinator of the initiative*), was “to support companies, recognition and visibility, and ultimately it was very important to thank them for their effort to be more productive than ever at one of the most difficult times”.

3 The Strategy of the #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP Movement

Extensive media coverage and visibility was achieved at a national level. Over 132 million people were reached (with duplication). Over 120 companies described their experience, which served to inspire citizens around the whole country. Practically all conventional and unconventional forms of media were used: 771 articles in the main press; 461 cases explained on the internet; 800,000 views of videos of companies on own channels used.

3.1 The Evolution of the Movement: From #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP to #EActiVate

On 24 May 2020, after two and a half months of activity, supported by over 3,000 companies of all sizes, businesspeople, freelancers, entrepreneurs and employees, “#ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP” began a new phase oriented toward economic reactivation and transformed into “#EActiVate”. This initiative was created to address a greater challenge: accelerating and activating the Spanish economy, bringing visibility to and highlighting initiatives driven by different sectors, and which inspired the activation of others with their actions, to overcome the social and economic consequences of the impact of the health crisis on the economy and the country’s business and industrial structure. “#EActiVate is the logical evolution of #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP; a step further. Now it’s not only about not stopping, it is about accelerating. We are focusing all our action on driving economic activity, on staying active, because the best way to predict the future is by creating it, and in this project we are all united. It is time to do what we know best: take risks, undertake projects, work, be creative and generate well-being,” stated the coordinator of the business initiative, Paula Llop, before the launch of the new #EActiVate platform.



Fig. 2 “Today we say “(E)ActiVate: it is not only about not stopping, it is about accelerating. This is no time to limit ourselves”

3.2 The #EActiVate as a Digital Platform for Audiovisual Content

In addition to highlighting the cases of companies whose actions show how to help society, the online space includes sections with dialogue between businesspeople, recommendations for notable professional training events and programmes, graphic reports, studies, and an extensive list of the latest information to inspire others not to stop and to accelerate.

The new digital space soon became a meeting point for businesspeople, freelancers, entrepreneurs and employees. It is an online platform for continuing to be present, giving visibility to their ideas and actions, with the added aim of honouring their work and paying tribute to them, inspiring others, and above all serving as an incentive for reactivating the country’s economy together. In this way, in just 6 months, 2,000 new companies joined #EActiVate, allowing the initiative to reach the total of over 5,000 members. Over 1,400 audiovisual content items were posted, which generated one and a half million visits to the page and almost 7.5 million users to be reached on all social networks (see Fig. 2).

3.3 The #EActiVate Comes to Life in Person, Through Business Events

In September #EActiVate took the leap from digital to an in-person format, collaborating at different events to present the initiative and share some inspiring actions of the participating companies throughout the country. The main business associations

of Spain also increased their in-person events and had the presence of #EActiVate. Also notable was the *Gran Acto del Corredor Mediterráneo*, held in November 2020, which became one of the first large events to commit to being in person, attended by numerous businesspeople and representatives from civil society, as well as being broadcast in hybrid format, as it could also be followed by *streaming*. Additionally, business fairs, conferences and cultural events at a national level were also in person during autumn of 2020.

The push by business to reactivate the economy and recover commercial values as soon as possible was, according to authoritative voices, key to accelerating the recovery of the Spanish economy.

4 Legacy of the Reactivation: A Service for Social Learning and Literacy

In February 2022, after two years of activity, and with over 5,500 member companies of the #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP and #EActiVate initiatives, *Legacy of the Reactivation* emerges as the most powerful hub for social knowledge and learning in situations of maximum uncertainty, such as those experienced during the pandemic. Legacy of the Reactivation is the largest source of documents and audiovisual content, setting out how businesspeople, employees, entrepreneurs and freelancers have reactivated the economy during one of the greatest crises experienced in society. The stories of more than 5,500 Spanish companies and their work since the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis are documented in the *Legacy of the Reactivation*, an initiative that compiles their teachings, facts, advice and experiences so that they can serve as a teaching tool for companies, business schools and universities in the face of future crises (*La Vanguardia; Europapress*, 15/02/2022). It contains over 3,000 articles of great business and historic interest. Authoritative and influential voices, over 500 inspiring videos about large companies, SMEs, entrepreneurs and freelancers, who despite the difficult situation that the global economy has experienced, have been active, have innovated, have digitised, have reinvented themselves, and have committed to sustainability during the last two years, to drive and accelerate the economic recovery of the country.

The purpose of *Legacy of the Reactivation* is to continue inspiring future generations and to become a memory resource so as not to forget what was learned from one of the greatest crises we have experienced (see Fig. 3). It does so through a valuable source of knowledge so that society in general, businesspeople, employees, entrepreneurs, freelancers and university students and researchers have a permanent record of this difficult period experienced, and the resilience of the business fabric, key for recovering confidence and a positive course in the Spanish economy.

After two years of the project, we must highlight what companies have achieved, because the largest database of cases of business reactivation during the pandemic has been built," states Paula Llop, manager of the #EActiVate initiative, adding that "we have transformed



Fig. 3 “Discover the inspiring actions of over 5,500 companies”, the message on the website

the initiative into a centre for historic documentation which leaves a business Legacy with what has been learned from #ThisdoesNOThavetoSTOP and #EActiVate.

Additionally, she wished to highlight the great work carried out by all professionals and companies that are members of the project. “The initiative is proud to have had the involvement and support of so many companies since its creation. This legacy is a great way of paying homage to all their efforts. Thank you for all of the learning you have shared, which will serve as an inspiration for future generations.”

4.1 Content of Legacy of the Reactivation

Legacy of the Reactivation can be defined as a digital hub for social and business inspiration. The content is divided into 5 sections (see Table 1):

Archive: more than 3,000 reactivation news items and more than 500 audiovisual contents are available. Contents: FIVE AXES OF THE REACTIVATION (Employability, Infrastructures, Productivity, Reinventing oneself or Sustainability). CATEGORIES (News, Activating Facts, Dialogues, Council, Graphic Report or Visual Report). GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION (Autonomous Community, province or city). COMPANY SIZE (Large Companies, SMEs, Professionals, Self-Employed or Entrepreneurs). SECTOR (Commerce, Agrifood, Supermarkets, Finance, Industry, Energy, Construction, Health, Science, Technology, Culture, Education or Tourism). NAME OF INDIVIDUAL OR COMPANY. All contents were published between March 2020 and February 2022, being a historical value of the exceptional moment.

Table 1 The legacy of the reactivation content structure

Sections of <i>legacy of the reactivation</i>	Description
“The movement”	The evolution of the initiative, from March 2020 to February 2022. A timeline of how the business fabric was activated to recover the country’s economy. Through articles, videos, reports and graphics which show some of the key moments
“Expert voices”	The keys to economic reactivation through the testimonials of 250 businesspeople and representatives from civil society, which have the historic value of having been recorded during the two years of the health crisis
“Reactivation stories”	Businesspeople respond to a series of key questions to hear first-hand what the health crisis meant for their companies and what they have learned. Their answers serve as an inspiration and example for the future
“Archive”	Containing over 3,000 articles on reactivation and over 500 audiovisual content items. The search categories are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Keys to the reactivation – Geographic location – Company size – Production sector – Name of the natural or legal person
“Acknowledgements”	List of 5,500 companies, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, freelancers, employees, associations and organisations which are members of the initiative, sharing their actions to inspire others in economic reactivation

4.2 The Challenges of Legacy of the Reactivation Regarding Its Stakeholders

- Designing and positioning it in society as a hub essentially for business, of a virtual nature, for social learning and innovation, emerging in the exceptional context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Its consideration as a Hub should promote connection with new business and entrepreneurial experiences and with the regenerative values and ethic for the immediate future. Humanity had never before experienced such circumstances, and in *Legacy of the Reactivation*, there is a credible record of what many influential and inspiring businesspeople said, as well as what their companies did, at a crucial moment in recent history. *Legacy of the Reactivation* may undoubtedly promote a substantial improvement of the reputation of businesspeople and their legitimacy in the new era.
- Designing and positioning *Legacy of the Reactivation* among the business collective as a business hub for connection with real experiences of businesspeople, inspiring figures from civil society, entrepreneurs, freelancers and companies during the pandemic and drawing conclusions for highly uncertain environments and circumstances. It may promote the recycling of managers, as well as promoting new leadership for highly uncertain, high-tension environments. Its

content promotes strategic, sectoral approaches, based on the nature or type of company (family or non-family), the region, from a gender perspective, or based on the extent of disruption, innovation or social responsibility.

- Designing and positioning it among the education community as the largest centre of audiovisual content, of experiences narrated in first person by renowned businesspeople and their companies. This content is highly valuable for undergraduate and postgraduate teaching, especially in the fields of social and life sciences and in subjects which allow case studies. *Legacy of the Reactivation* is an endless source for learning values, for example. Likewise, it allows the study of leaders, owners and managers of companies from psychosocial, anthropological, leadership and communication perspectives.

4.3 *The Results of the Initiative, from March 2020 to February 2022*

One of the most interesting approaches of this initiative is the success in terms of repercussion and notoriety in the media and social networks, as indicators of its public impact. In Google, for example, more than 189,000 results appear when entering “Legado de la Reactivación” and more than 8,250 videos, as of 3 March 2023 (see Table 2).

Table 2 Use of communication in *legacy of the reactivation*

Total members of the initiative	Companies, businesspeople, entrepreneurs, freelancers and employees	5,523
The initiative in the media	– Articles published	2,872
	– Total people reached with appearances in the news (paper, digital, TV and radio)	462,514,425 ^a
The initiative online		
Website	Content posted	7,177
	Visits received	1,077,676 ^a
	Pages viewed	2,036,706 ^a
Social networks	Content viewed	59,114,235 ^a
	Interactions	285,168
	Video plays	1,784,634 ^a
Total website + social networks + newsletter	Times that the content has been viewed	62,980,481 ^a

^aWith duplication

5 Conclusions

In contexts of uncertainty, it has become clear that communication plays an essential role in the service of collective interests. Companies, through successful and innovative management of personal and media communication, as we have seen through their collective project, *Legacy of Reactivation*, have promoted common and social interests. In summary, we can draw several conclusions from our analysis of the case. For the first time, CEOs of major companies stood in front of their home cameras and filmed messages with little or no control from their homes. The pandemic encouraged spontaneity and communication that was not (overly) scripted or premeditated. *Legacy of Reactivation* has generated a corpus of videos of this nature and content that should be analysed in future work. First, *Legacy of the Reactivation* can be seen as a collectively owned intangible resource, born out of an entrepreneurial movement at a unique moment in recent history. Second, we are convinced that this case has a high value for learning and social innovation. Thirdly, the case demonstrates the need for strategic and professional management of communication, media and networks and design, as has happened with this collective movement. And finally, it can serve for the literacy of business managers and entrepreneurs in contexts of crisis, as well as to enhance business and personal resilience, for new situations of extreme uncertainty that will surely come in the future.

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