Article

Communicating the Resilience and Corporate Social Responsibility of SMEs during Lockdown in Spain: A Visual and Exploratory Study of Communication Mechanisms and Strategies

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Abstract: The health crisis caused by COVID-19 has led to changes in the behaviour of businesses during lockdown, especially Small and Medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). This study aims to identify the capacity for reaction, resilience, and corporate social responsibility (CSR) from direct sources and from strategic communication categories. Firstly, to discover the communication mechanisms and strategies of innovative SMEs during lockdown in Spain for overcoming difficulties. And secondly, to confirm "Food and Drink"—sector SME resilience capacities through their communications, and the CSR capacity of the SMEs that supports the sustainability to the tourism sector. For this purpose, a qualitative analysis of the 2.0 messages communicated by the companies was carried out and a map generated from social network analysis to identify the most resilient SMEs based on strategic communication elements used. The results show an uneven business reaction that reflects the change of paradigm in communication with customers that is occurring heterogeneously. This study is original because few on this theme apply to SMEs in the Spanish context. We highlight they are all from the "Food and drink" sector and included in the list of enterprises with high growth rate through entrepreneurial spirit and innovation, allowing us to make certain comparisons and understand certain differences and respective resilience, including supply chains and CSR.

Keywords: SMEs; strategic communication; resilience; corporate social responsibility; tourism; COVID-19; lockdown; Spain; qualitative analysis; social network analysis

1. Introduction

The pandemic situation provoked an unprecedented social and economic impact, above all when lockdown was declared. It led to a modification of the experience of the customer [1] and, as a consequence, it has been necessary to adapt marketing contents and strategies [2]. Thus, has posed new challenges for business leaders in general and specially of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) because they had to react and to be resilient to work around the new social and health situation [3]. On the one hand, SMEs had to reorganise and make decisions in order to maintain their production and services observing the health and logistical restrictions in place at the time [4]. On the other hand, they played a leading role in social sustainability being references when showing control in the face of this extraordinary situation. For this reason there are a number of studies focused on an analysis of what occurred during this period [5–7]. However, either due to the study of heterogeneous sectors, or because a single sector has been investigated, they prohibit the confirmation of behavioural patterns.

The importance of small and medium sized companies [8] is due to their defining characteristics: number of employees, turnover and annual balance. They are the fundamental basis of the economy of the European Union [9]. The group of micro, small and medium enterprises represents from between 82% of German companies up to 97.4% of

Greek businesses. They play a dynamic role in economic development as they increase competition and stimulate employment and innovation. Moreover, since 2020, one of the three pillars in the European strategy has been the development of capabilities and support for transition to sustainability and digitalisation of SMEs [8–16].

The number of small and medium enterprises is increasing, and statistics reveal that more than 90% of the "food & drink" economic sector falls in this category [17]. Thus, more attention to this kind of enterprises should be paid [18,19].

It is a fact that large companies have greater material capacity with more technological and financial resources. However, Vossen [10] has argued that small companies have more "behavioural advantages" in terms of rapid decision-making and flexibility. As a consequence it is logical for SMEs to be, in general, less innovating than large companies [11,12]. Nevertheless, in recent years SMEs have expressed an interest in innovation due to a better capacity for differentiating themselves and serving niches in the market due to the facilities offered by digital media, thus allowing for greater competitive capacity [5,20].

Innovation is defined as "implementing new ideas that create value" [21] (p. 1), or in other words the introduction of something new and different and its implementation or materialisation, which involves creative work [22–24]. Strategy is the outcome of decisions made to guide an organization with respect to environment, structure and processes that have a bearing on enterprise performance. These decisions can be come from the new social, economic, political or commercial context. Despite this, the relationship between innovating companies and their capacity for resilience and flexibility in their customer communication models has not, in my opinion, been questioned enough. Although theoretical studies on strategic communication exist, it still suffers from a lack of practical understanding and as regards how it can be used to identify aspects relating to resilience and social sustainability such as corporate social responsibility (CSR).

There are also studies on resilience strategies to maintain the supply chain [25,26] during COVID-19 [27]. However, no framework has been forthcoming to provide analyses on SMEs from different perspectives.

There has been some research on SME corporative behaviour during lockdown [28–30] through bibliographic reviews or questionnaires [31], but the matter still needs to be explored to provide a complete picture of how to use digital communication to maintain engagement with clients, staff and other members of the community through direct data, such as posts and other web based messaging 2.0. In addition, SMEs are also very important for sustainability due to their resilience in dealing with the sanitary crisis [31] along with corporate social responsibility (CSR). Consequently, they should be identified because both are challenges that can be reflected in strategic communications and can help to build sustainable competitive advantage. This research paper examines several communication strategies that help us to recognize the resilience capacity of SMEs in a qualitative way.

The relationship between company and customers adds value to the language used in these business communication actions, and this is not only the case for digital marketing. Digital marketing is focused specifically on consumers and corporate marketing communication adapts to consumer needs [32] and is planned systematically [33]. This promotion of business communication in all its strategic aspects is summarised in the Value Circle of Communication by Zerfass & Viertmann [34,35].

2. Literature Review

2.1. Strategic Communication in SMEs

In information society times, digital communication is becoming increasingly important for companies [36]. Such communication encompasses advertisements and publicity through email, social media platforms, websites, and interactions through electronic commerce, amongst others. Marketing departments design their content focused on inbound marketing [37,38]. The aim of corporate communication is to present a good opinion of the company in an institutional context, often related to branding [39–41]. The number

of functions and objectives of the digital communication of a company has led today to the appearance of the term "strategic communication".

Strategic communication is a field [42] that comprises several disciplines including marketing, advertising and public relations, and has the purpose of achieving the mission of the organization [43] (p. 4). Strategic communication has stablished theorical bases [44,45] in a multilevel approach towards encompassing and aligning the organization's different communication activities and subdisciplines [46]. The design of contents through each communication channel must be customized to a given objective from the corporate strategy.

Each communication function -as a function of marketing, relationship with the media or community, among others- fulfills specific objectives, and is targeted at specific constituencies. Different frameworks have been designed that include strategic objectives [34,35,47].

2.2. Communication Value Circle

The communication between company and clients adds value through language used and communication activities. This idea of delivering the value of business communication professionals is summarized into the Value Circle of Communication (Figure 1) by Zerfass & Viertmann [34] and Volk et al. [35].
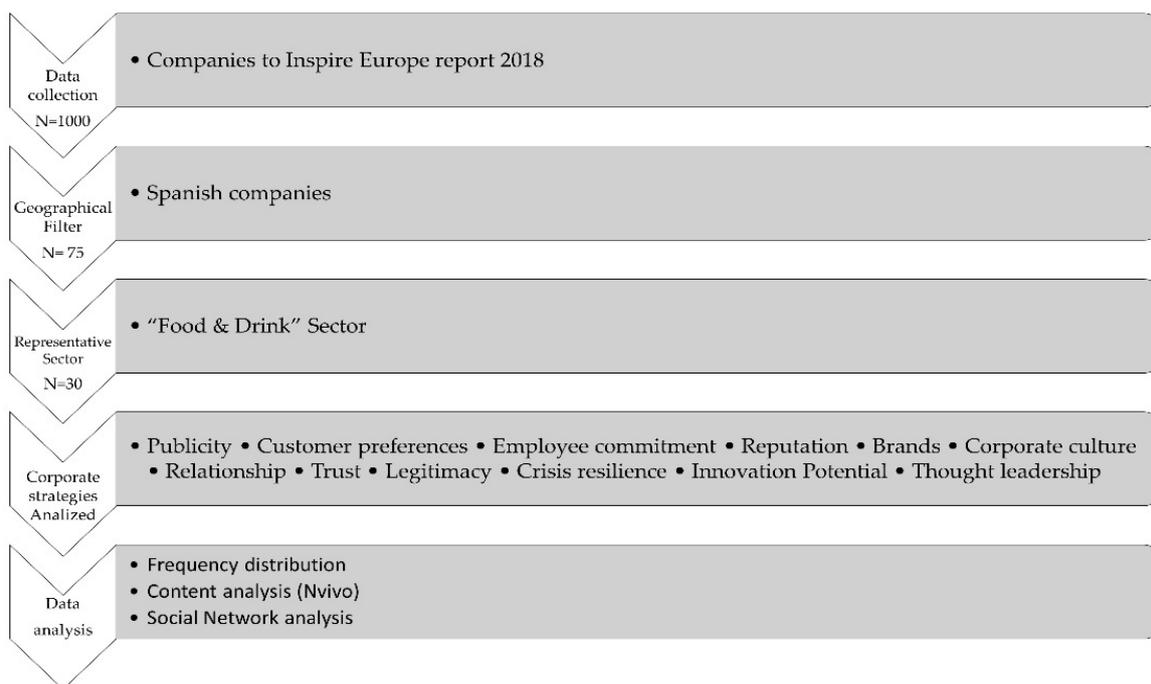

Figure 1. Flow chart of the analysis process.

The Communication Value Circle [48] has been designed to align communication targets with the overarching corporate strategy and can be used as tool to explain the value-add of communications and as an evaluation tool to verify whether corporative objectives have been reached. It was assumed that corporate strategies are reflected in both corporate management and corporate communication, and they should be approached from different perspectives (Table 1), such as having tangible assets in intangible assets, and creating value now (room for manoeuvre) and in the future (creating development opportunities).

Table 1. Strategic components in value of communication framework.

Perspectives	Strategic Component
tangible assets	Publicity
	Customer preferences
	Employee commitment
intangible assets	Reputation
	Brands
	Corporate culture
room for maneuver	Relationships
	Trust
	Legitimacy
development opportunities creation	Crisis resilience
	Thought leadership
	Innovation potential

To implement these communication strategies, the company must think about the information content, the channel and the rhetorical style to be transmitted [49–54].

However, there is a lack of studies on how these communication strategies are put into practice through the messages issued by companies. That is, how these communicative strategies are presented and detected.

2.3. Innovation, Resilience, and Corporate Social Responsability

Innovation is the successful implementation of creative ideas [55,56] and is closely connected to resilience [57–61] and to corporate social responsibility (CSR).

On one hand, the concept of resilience is being used in different domains [62,63]. In spite of a variety of contexts, resilience is the capacity of adaptation and can be defined as *"the ability of a system to return to its original state or move to a new, more desirable state after being disturbed"* [64] (p. 2).

Williams et al. [65] propose a model for exploring those of SMEs identifying five talents or capacities -congnitive, behavioural, emotional, relational and financial- with experimentation and trustworthiness [66]. Save for cognitive, which permits the detection of threats and compilation of information at times of great uncertainty, the rest are capacities that need communication for their dissemination, given that their purpose is to:

- provide unique answers to extraordinary problems (behavioural)
- share values and transmit assurance (emotional)
- maintain connections of trust and engagement (relational)
- assign resources to new projects in order to provide answers to new situations (financial).

All of the foregoing is the result of an analysis of SMEs identified with a high-quality job creation −36% two-year job growth rate-through entrepreneurial spirit and innovation [67]. Our initial hypothesis is that if these SMEs are in fact innovative, they should show resilient or proactive attitudes during lockdown. The aim of this study is to confirm these resilience capacities through their communications.

On the other hand, the concept of corporate social responsibility (CSR) is linked to responsible and ethical behaviours within a business, encompassing how a business treats people in its network and creates shared value, how it manages its employees' health, safety and professional growth, and how it interacts with its local community [68–70]. The variety of definitions refer to five dimensions: environmental, social, economic, interaction with stakeholders, solidarity actions [71].

In recent years literature reviews have shown special interest in the relationship between innovation and CSR [72–76] and analysis of the influence of CSR in corporate innovation [77], some of them focused on Spain [78,79].

2.4. "Tourism" and "Food & Drink" Sectors

There are studies that confirm that hospitality business (hotels, bars and restaurants, etc.) are the greatest link in the relationship between the services sector dedicated to tourism and the sector of the production and commercialization of food and drink [80].

Economic sectors as Tourism, Hospitality, and restaurants; and Food and Drink were seriously impacted by lockdown [81]. There are analyses focused on food and beverage sector as a part of the tourism industry [82]. However, the COVID-19 situation has caused a reaction also from the perspective of social responsibility [83]. In our opinion, messages of support between sectors should be studied from a general perspective; in particular, those contents of encouragement for the tourism sector as a whole, along with those dedicated to workers and customers, help to create a better opinion of the company, and could confirm the actual relationship between the "Food and Drink" and tourism sectors.

For all of the foregoing, the objective of this study was, on one hand, to analyse the communication mechanism and communication strategies with particular reference to thoseused by SMEs during the lockdown period in Spain due to the COVID-19 pandemic; furthermore, we identify what different strategic elements are comprised within Zerfass's value circle of business communication, and to what extent they have been used by SMEs. On the other hand, with an analysis of the content of messages communicated, we determine the capacity for resilience and spirit of social responsibility of the SMEs studied that drive social and economic sustainability. Finally, through the analysis of a single basic needs sector—"Food and Drink"—our aim was to discover behavioural patterns within communication strategies between SMEs, especially in those that reflect economic, social and environmental sustainability.

Conclusively, this paper addresses the following research questions:

RQ 1: To what extent have SMEs communicated with clients and employees during lockdown?

RQ 2: What mechanisms/channels are used to spread these communications?

RQ 3: What communication strategies have been detected in messages from Spanish SMEs in the "Food & Drink" sector? What mechanisms are used?

RQ 4: How many SMEs communicated resilience and environmental, social and economic sustainability? What mechanisms are used?

RQ 5: How can the map of more resilient SMEs based on corporative communication strategy values be visualized?

RQ 6: Can any support or empathy from the "Food & Drink" sector to the "Tourism" sector by SMEs messages be identified?

The results show the situation of the communication practices by potentially innovating Spanish SMEs during the lockdown imposed as a result of COVID-19.

3. Materials and Methods

Due to it being a qualitative study of the messages sent by companies mentioning COVID-19 during the lockdown period, it was decided to delimit the sample to businesses in Spain (Figure 1).

In order to reach the objective of the analysis of the communication mechanisms used by innovating SMEs, Spanish enterprises were selected that featured on the 1000 Companies to Inspire Europe report, created within the Elite program by the London Stock Exchange Group (LSEG) in 2018 [67] and harvesting enterprises from 66 sectors (Table 2). The aforementioned company is responsible for the London Stock Exchange and has the prestige and reputation for creating an objective list.

Table 2. Sectors of 1000 companies Europe-2018.

1000 Companies Europe-2018		
Agriculture/Farming/Forestry	Engineering	Media
Aviation Services	Environmental Services	Motor vehicle retail
Business Services	Facilities Services	Packaging facilities
Chemicals	Fitness & Health	Pharmaceutical/Science
Cleaning Services	Food & Drink	Professional Services
Clothing	Green energy	Retail
Clothing (Manufacturing)	Health	Security
Construction/Property	Import/Export	Services
Consumer Services	IT Technology	Technology
Design	Landscape services	Telecommunications
Design & Manufacturing	Logistics	Textiles
Education	Machining	Transportation
Electronics	Manufacturing	Travel/Leisure
Employment Services	Manufacturing & Engineering	Utilities
Energy	Marketing	Veterinary Services
		Wholesale

The collection of data, the results of which are discussed in this article, was carried out during the lockdown period between 13 March and 1 July 2020 in Spain.

Of the 75 businesses appearing on the list, it was decided to maintain a sectoral homogeneity, choosing the Food & Drink sector comprising 30 companies and representing 40% of the SMEs included in the report cited above. Most of these companies (Table 3) are engaged in the production and trade of fresh food (oils, meat, fish, fruits and vegetables), as well as in the manufacture of other types of food (generally coffees, sweets or candies, desserts and beverages).

We compiled the messages sent directly by small and medium enterprises, all in Spanish, via their digital channels both from their websites-websites and corporate blogs-and their profiles on social networks -Facebook and Twitter. These contents were found in the form of websites (home, COVID-19 sections, news, . . .), blog entries and blog, Facebook and Twitter posts.

The content of the messages sent by companies during the study period was qualitatively analysed with the aid of the NVivo software program [84–86]. With this tool, the extracts or analysis units were codified under one or more categories. Each one corresponds to a strategic communication element, taking the Value Circle of Communication [35] as a reference.

The next step of the study is to identify the practices or application of the communicative components of the business communication value circle Table 4 organises the strategic components reflected in the communication value circle of Zerfass & Viertmann [34,35]. We have adapted some of them in order to have an awareness of the messages received (e.g., Customer preferences) or sent (e.g., Employee commitment) via the digital space of each SME. For example, in the case of the "employee commitment" component, although Volk et al. [35] refer on the whole to employee attitudes towards the company, in this study we have identified the attitude of the company towards its personnel and the dissemination of actions implemented by the company in collaboration with workers (e.g.,. donations).

Table 3. SMEs of "Food & Drink" sector.

Literal Primario NAICS 2017	Total	%
Frozen Fruit, Juice, and Vegetable Manufacturing	5	17%
Nonchocolate Confectionery Manufacturing	3	10%
Offices of Bank Holding Companies	2	7%
Meat Processed from Carcasses	2	7%
Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Merchant Wholesalers	2	7%
Fish and Seafood Merchant Wholesalers	2	7%
Animal (except Poultry) Slaughtering	2	7%
Supermarkets and Other Grocery (except Convenience) Stores	1	3%
Soybean and Other Oilseed Processing	1	3%
Soft Drink Manufacturing	1	3%
Other Management Consulting Services	1	3%
Offices of Certified Public Accountants	1	3%
Miscellaneous Financial Investment Activities	1	3%
Ice Cream and Frozen Dessert Manufacturing	1	3%
General Line Grocery Merchant Wholesalers	1	3%
Fluid Milk Manufacturing	1	3%
Dairy Product (except Dried or Canned) Merchant Wholesalers	1	3%
Beer and Ale Merchant Wholesalers	1	3%
All Other Specialty Food Stores	1	3%

Table 4. Strategic components in value of communication framework.

Component	Content and Communication Tool or Trigger
Publicity	Both products and services
Customer preferences	Mechanism (trigger) that pushes the customer to act and that permits their opinion or reaction (lead) towards a product, service, brand or company to be known
Employee commitment	Messages from the company to its staff, dissemination of actions carried out by workers or in collaboration with them (e.g., donations).
Reputation	Subjective and generalised perception of the company, either for what it does or for what it talks about through available means of communication.
Brands	Identification and differentiation of the company mentioning its name and/or creating slogans relating to the pandemic situation.
Corporate culture	Contents that reflect social values, and the use of the most well-known social responsibility slogans.
Relationships	Content posted by the company both to attract customers and to thank collaborators, security forces and healthcare workers.
Trust	Messages referring to prevention and communication of trust.
Legitimacy	Capacity for acting coherently as regards socially accepted norms and expectations of interested parties. The clearest action in this component is customer service.
Thought leadership	Capacity for leadership influences the transfer of ideas and convincing others to carry out some type of action. An example would be support for other services, a crucial aspect in economic sustainability.
Innovation potential	The capacity to identify opportunities for new products and services and understand trends and ideas is clearly reflected in advertising new products.

The meaning units that a category is assigned to can correspond to a complete message when it involves a post, tweet, title or start out from such a message when involving blog

entries or specific paragraphs. That is, this meaning unit corresponds to a sentence or group of sentences that comprise a specific message and which can reflect more than one strategic component. Therefore, in this type of qualitative analysis the determining factor is not so much the number of posts but the content thereof. This permits us to discover whether or not a determined action or strategy has been implemented.

Moreover, categories were allocated for complete messages from each company, thus enabling the quantitative analysis thereof and the identification of communication values for each SME. For this results analysis an anonymization process was implemented on the names of the companies.

In order to determine whether a company materialises corporate social responsibility or resilience actions, a series of categories from digital marketing were added to codify the content of the message more precisely (Figure 2). These categories are an adaptation of the objectives of digital marketing through communication, namely, to attract, engage, retain, learn from customers and relate [7,87]. Following this qualitative analysis, a frequency analysis of the messages was carried out based on these codes representing actions (behavioural and financial resilience) or attitudes (emotional and relational or commitment) framed in one of the four dimensions of resilience.

Figure 2. Categories for identifying resilience and CSR.

Moreover, a table was developed to represent these companies and identify them through social network analysis (Table 5). Here the categories of strategic communication are linked with the aspects of resilience and CSR corporate social responsibility in order to study them for each company. In addition to the codification of messages representing the strategic communication categories, two more codes were added within the advertising category to differentiate the publicity of new products or services that respond to a resilience action from publicity messages advertising regular products or services.

Finally, a social networks analysis was carried out with the aid of the Gephi tool [88–90]. On the one hand the situation between the companies was represented from the strategic elements they share and, on the other, there was a visualization of the relationships between the different value circle communication components in terms of the messages sent by the companies to describe patterns in the use of business communication elements.

Table 5. Strategic components in relation to resilience and CSR.

Corporate Communication Contents	Communication Strategy	Resilience/CSR	Resilience and CSR Referred to:
• Publicity	Publicity		
	Employee Commitment	Corporate Social Responsibility	CSR in dimensions: interaction with stakeholders, solidarity actions
• Lead	Customer Preferences	Resilience	Comportamental resilience
• Quality and Environment • Remote working • Solidarity actions. donation and collaboration • Agreements and Grants • Slogan use	Reputation	Corporate Social Responsibility/Resilience	Corporate Social Responsibility in dimensions: interaction with stakeholders, solidarity actions
• Slogan creation	Brands		Providing unique answers to extraordinary problems
• Agreements and Grants	Corporate Culture	Resilience	Emotional resilience (sharing values and transmitting security) CSR in dimensions: environmental, social, economic
• Inbound Marketing • Gratitude	Relationships		Relational and emotional Resilience (aintaining trust and engagement)
• Preventive healthcare • Other recommendations	Trust		Relational Resilience
• Customer assistance Service	Legitimacy		
• Call to sustainability support (Hospitality and restaurant business support)	Thought Leadership	Corporate Social Responsibility/Resilience	Comportamental and/or financial resilience (allocating resources to new projects in order to solve new situations). CSR in dimensions: environmental, social, economic
• New products and services	Innovation Potential		

4. Results

According to the methodology described above, the first step is to compile all the messages from the digital channels.

4.1. RQ 1: To What Extent Have SMEs Communicated with Clients and Employees during Lockdown?

156 complete messages were compiled, generating 4061 analysis units or extracts. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize data frequency.

These messages originated from 25 companies, as five of them (16.67%) did not make any type of communication referring to COVID-19 during the period studied. The five most communicative companies published between 22 (14% of messages) and 9 (6%) and at least half of them sent 4 messages.

In the process of coding the analysis units, it was discovered that one company (C12) had sent just two messages. However, given their length, it created a high number of analysis units.

In this case, the percentage of SMEs that do not carry out any type of communication in Spain stands at 16.7% in the Food & Drink sector. This datum contrasts with the corresponding 4.5% of all types of communication, solely to content marketing in the case of Poland [5].

4.2. RQ 2: What Mechanisms/Channels Are Used to Spread These Communications?

Figure 3 shows the digital channels used for communication during lockdown with messages alluding to the pandemic, to COVID-19 or any situation arising as a result thereof. The majority of the SMEs had a Facebook profile (60%) and close to 50% updated their website during this period, Twitter was in third place with 36.67% of companies with a profile on the platform and 23.33% had an active blog during lockdown. These data on the existence of company websites and the creation of a business profile on these two social networks resemble those produced by the study carried out in Romania [91]. Nevertheless, in relation to the number of communications sent, the medium most used was still the website, in 53.59% of cases, followed by the blog (26.80%), and leaving the social networks on a second plane (Facebook 11.76% and Twitter 7.84%). Once again it is confirmed how publications on websites, both on the "news" and "press" sections or via a blog, are the most used mediums for communication, such as the transport sector in Poland as concluded by Ziółkowska in her study [5].
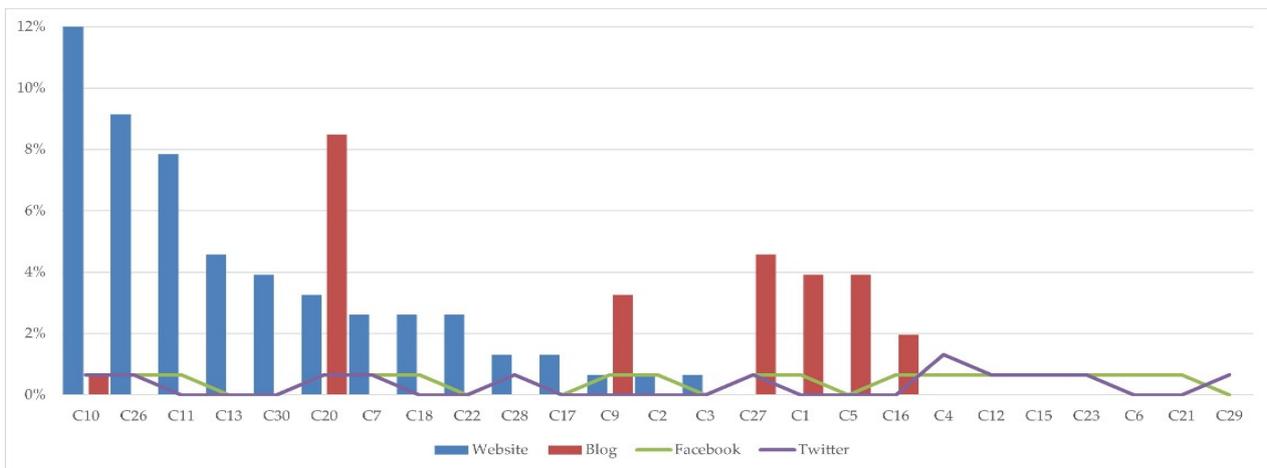

Figure 3. Communication channels.

We can state that 60% of SMEs used the website, including the blog, for their communications. Only 6.7% of companies -C10 and C20- had and used the four channels (Table 6). And compared to the 20% of companies that communicated solely via their website or blog, 23% sent their messages exclusively via social networks.

The results show that 16.7% of SMEs did not issue any type of communication during lockdown, although it should be noted that more than half of the companies (53%) issued communications through one or two channels. In single-channel communication, the most used channel was the website (16.7%). A mere 6.7% of the companies had multi-channel communication through the four channels used in this study.

Facebook was the most used digital communication tool, employed by 60% of SMEs (Figure 4), but with only 6.7% using it as a single channel. It is the priority social network according to companies with multi-channel communication (53.3%), being the second medium along with Twitter (13.3%), website (10%) and blog (6.7%).

Table 6. Number of channels used by SMEs during lockdown.

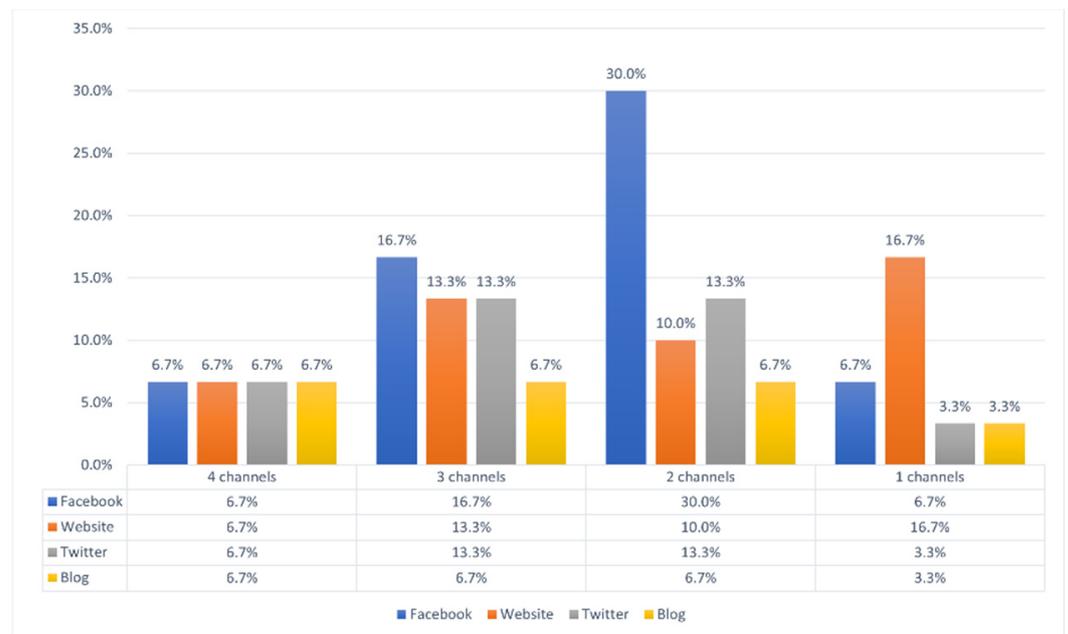| Number of Channels	4 Channels	3 Channels	2 Channels	1 Channel	No Channels
Number of SMEs	2	5	9	9	5
Percentage of SMEs	6.7%	16.7%	30.0%	30.0%	16.7%
SMEs	C10	C9	C11	C13	C8
	C20	C26	C18	C30	C14
		C7	C2	C22	C19
		C28	C1	C17	C24
		C27	C16	C3	C25
			C4	C5	
			C12	C6	
			C15	C21	
			C23	C29	

Figure 4. Types of channels by number of channels.

Some 10% of SMEs opted to use both social networks (Twitter and Facebook) over the blog, while 6.6% diversified their communications through websites, blogs social networks.

4.3. RQ 3: What Communication Strategies Have Been Detected in Messages from Spanish SMEs in the "Food & Drink" Sector? What Mechanisms Are Used?

Figure 5 shows the volume of SMEs that participate in each type of value circle communication strategy. The most used type is brand strategy (brand and name of company), fundamental in business communication. It is followed by advertising (73%), the basic marketing objective in a profit-seeking business, and in third place is reputation (70%), which permits the creation of a positive image of the company in general and its way of acting during this time period.
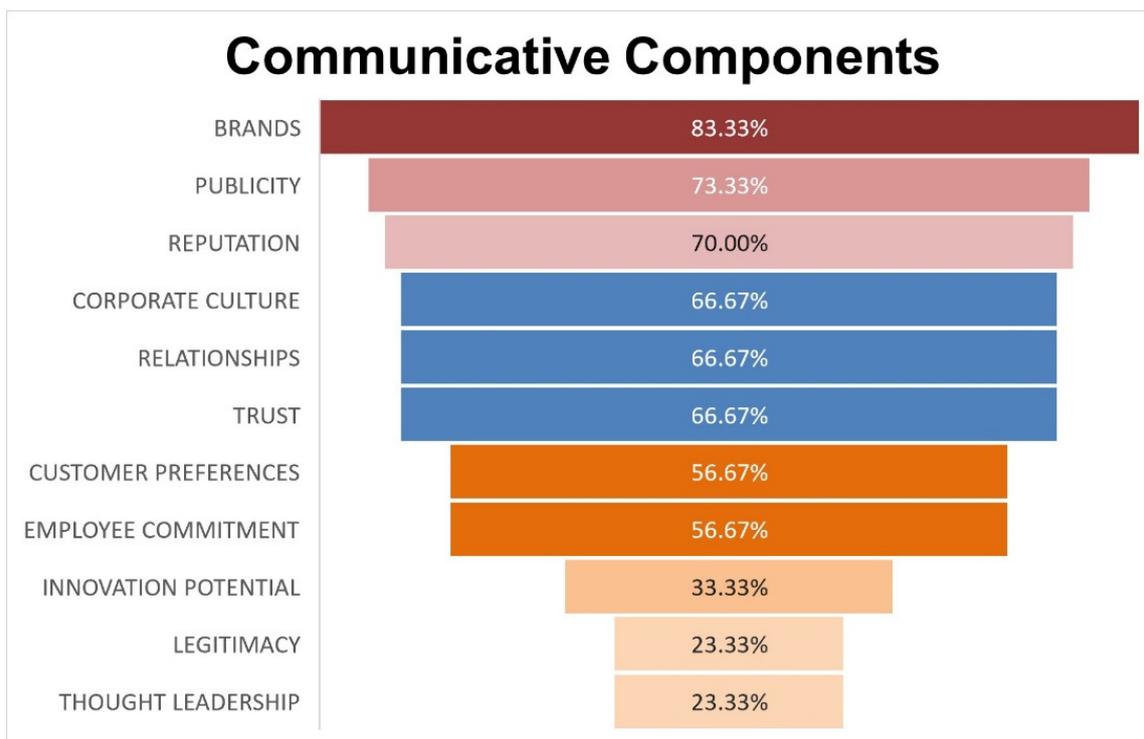
Figure 5. Presence of SMEs in Communicative components %.

It is noteworthy that the least represented component is leadership (thought leadership), as it is related to capacity to react and resilience. The image or impression that this component transmits has a bearing on customer perception of the company in the form of, on the one hand, legitimacy (with only 23.33% representation in business communications) and, on the other hand, trust.

These results describe what strategies are used by the highest number of companies. However, in order to discover the most frequently used elements of the communication value circle, the codified messages were previously counted under at least one communicative component (Table 4). It is confirmed that most messages are still collected under Brand, followed by the Relationships component (Table 7).

Table 7. Strategic Communication elements ranking (% frequency of occurrence in messages).

Strategic Communication Elements	Frequency
Brand	22.30
Relationships	18.01
Reputation	11.84
Corporate culture	11.15
Publicity	10.98
Trust	9.61
Customer preferences	4.97
Employee commitment	4.63
Innovation potential	2.57
Thought leadership	2.06
Legitimacy	1.89

Regarding the channels used, website existence and updating is confirmed in the "Food & Drink" sector SMEs, as occurs in Poland amongst dentistry professionals [91]; nevertheless, we highlight (Figure 6) the use of the blog as the most habitual manner. This is the most dynamic section in a website -sometimes in a separate directory- and is accessible to any person without a social network account.
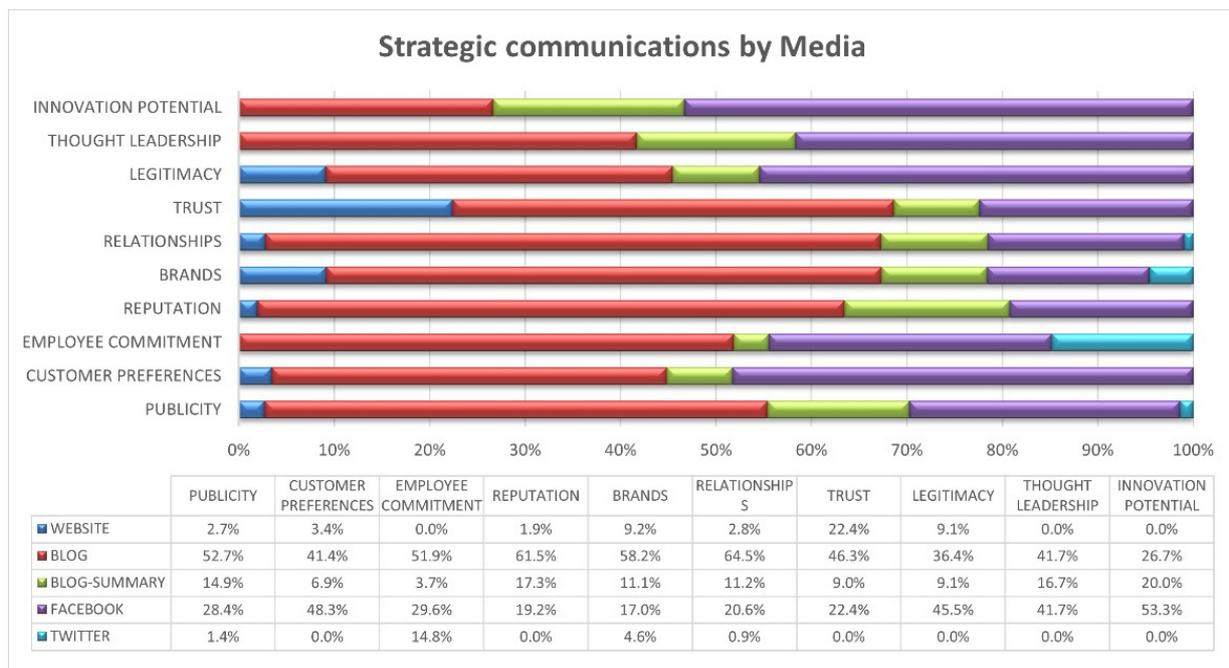
Figure 6. Strategic communications by media.

Along the same line, Facebook is still the most used and most popular social network by SMEs. It has advantages compared to other platforms as it allows messages that last longer in time than on Instagram, and which have a longer length than on Twitter. However, Twitter is a medium that is used above all by employees for a more direct relationship. This is why its use for immediate questions stands out. On the one hand, to find out the tastes and opinions of customers and transform them into innovation; and on the other hand, to quickly communicate in this crisis period both any new aid or facility for the customer, and any proposal or request for social responsibility that implies supporting economic sustainability (for example in the services sector).

We carried out a more in-depth analysis of the messages identified under the "advertising" strategic component in order to identify the channels of communication for those used (Figure 5). We were able to confirm that a switch has occurred with this strategy with Facebook at the head for the advertising of habitual products, but above all new products. It should also be noted that, for the advertising of habitual products, long-lasting over time, the blog is still very frequently used-either in the index or in one-off entries-. In this case there are many similarities with the study on the marketing of content in the transport sector in Poland [5]. As far as Twitter is concerned there is a greater discrepancy, but the results of both studies coincide on a greater use of Facebook for the marketing of content and advertising of new products.

4.4. RQ 4: How Many SMEs Communicated Resilience and Sustainability? What Mechanisms Are Used?

The analysis of the message content reveals that the resilience lies in the action rather than the terminology. For this reason, the word resilience, including its lexical variants, does not appear in any communication in the sector analysed. On the contrary, the resilience of the SME in this situation is found in the actions or messages communicated by these companies. In some cases they are actions of solidarity or collaborations, whereas in others they are the creation of new services or products to adapt to the situation and also the communication with customers to encourage economic and environmental sustainability.

Following the analysis of the codified contents (Table 8) the actions referring to environmental sustainability are reflected as being less frequent in the lockdown period (3.3%) and are found mentioned in three types: slogans created by the company, helping cus-

tomers in the form of new services or prioritising the service to specific types of customers -by age or special needs-, and also via communications promoting interactivity or user reaction (leads).

Table 8. Resilience and sustainability in SMEs digital communication.

	Environment	Employment and Economy	Consumption
Lead	3.3%	6.7%	60.0%
Customer assistance	3.3%	3.3%	13.3%
Slogan creation	3.3%		16.7%
Remote Working		53.3%	3.3%
Inbound Marketing		16.7%	50.0%
Other recommendations		16.7%	36.7%
Preventive healthcare		6.7%	3.3%
New products		3.3%	20.0%
Wishes		3.3%	10.0%
Gratitude		3.3%	3.3%
Solidarity actions. donation and collaboration		3.3%	3.3%
Call to Sustainability support			16.7%
Slogan use			10.0%
Agreements and Grants			6.7%

It is revealed that the different exhibitions of resilience -solidarity actions, collaborations, new products, customer service- are closely linked to environmental sustainability and promoting consumption, with economic sustainability actions on a secondary plane (Figure 7). These resilient companies are two supermarkets -C20 and C26-, and two frozen food companies -C7 and C22-, amongst others -C13, C15, C21, and C27-. Just two companies mention environmental sustainability: C13, via the creation of a slogan, and C15. Only the latter carries out actions focused on this sphere, however. Furthermore, in relation to economic sustainability, it is mainly supermarket C20 that makes the greatest number of communications focused on: Remote Working, Inbound Marketing, other recommendations, new products, new services for helping customers and recommendations related to preventive healthcare.
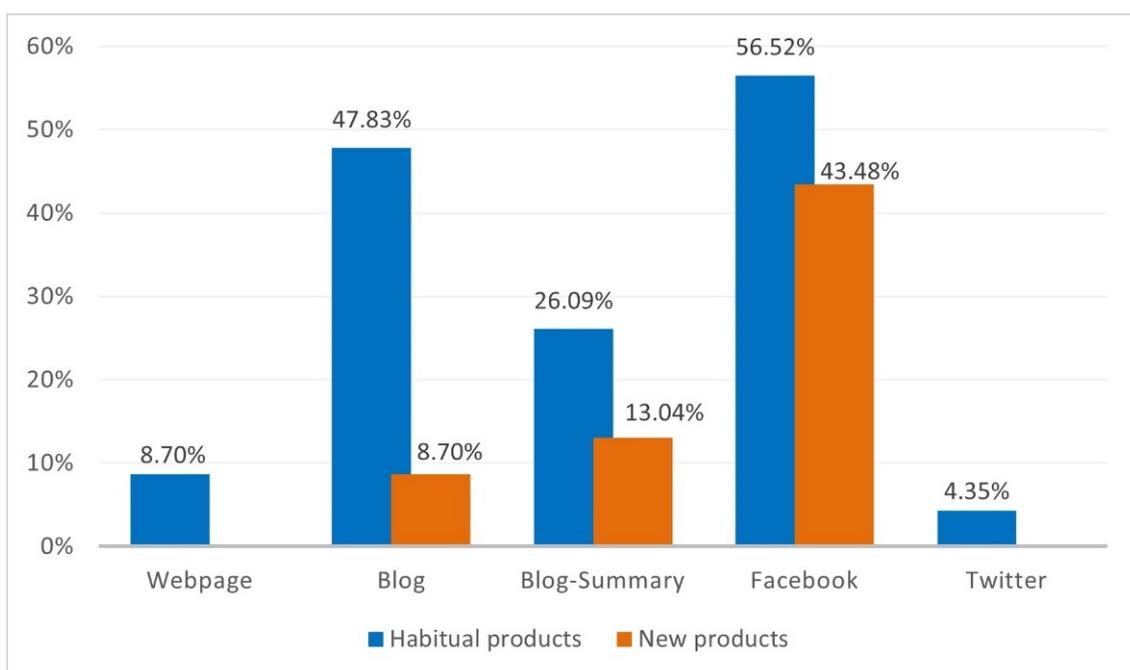

Figure 7. Communication channels for Publicity.

4.5. RQ 5: How Can the Map of More Resilient SMEs Based on Corporative Communication Strategy Values Be Visualized?

Digital communication strategies and their relationship with SMEs are represented via a social network. It should be borne in mind that the names of the cases are anonymized and that the position in the graph and its distance as regards the rest of the nodes is determined by coincidences in communication strategies with the other companies. It is a dense social network, due to the considerable relationship between the 26 companies. Those that coincide with other SMEs in the totality of the components selected are closer.

Figure 8 shows the ten companies with messages that come under at least nine of the eleven components of the communication value circle. These have greater proximity in relation to their communicative actions; in other words, the affinity is greater the more communicative strategies they share. In addition, the colour of the node shows the number of these strategies used by the SME represented, and the size shows the volume of corporate messages sent by the company.
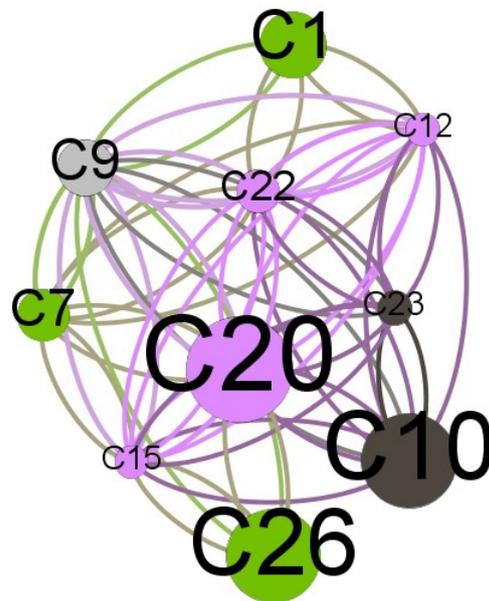

Figure 8. Network of the 10 most resilient SMEs and their components (Fruchteman & Reinhold).

Node C9 -light grey- is the only one to apply the total of the communicative strategies analysed in this work. This business is closer to the five SMEs whose communications fit inside all of the components apart from one (C7, C12, C15, C20 and C22) and, as such, coincide in using more communicative strategies.

The companies with a greater number of messages appear vertically in the central zone -C1, C20, C10 and C26. A certain volume of messages favours the possibility of using an increased number of strategies from the communication value circle -C9, 26, 20- but does not concern a lineal relationship, as occurs with C10, which does not have as many strategic categories in these messages. We find an inverse situation with those companies that disseminated fewer messages—between 12 and 13—but gathered a large quantity of strategies -C15, 12, 23 and C4-. Two of these SMEs, C15 and C23, dedicated to desserts and sweets, communicated exclusively via social networks. In any case, we are dealing with companies that demonstrate a usage of components proposed by Volk [35] in a very conscious manner within their business communication strategy. And we can conclude that the number of messages is important for obtaining better engagement with customers.

Furthermore, in the lower part of Figure 8 we can identify the companies that manage multi-channel communication strategies. At the lower end are the two companies that use the four communication mechanisms -C10 and C20- as well as those that use three channels -C26, C7 and C9- with the highest number of established communications. We can therefore

establish a relationship between the ability of an SME to manage its communications through various mechanisms, including social media, and its resilience.

In reference to the impact of supply chain issues on resilience, the qualitative analysis show that on the one hand, a number of supermarkets introduced new customer services and home delivery services, and on the other hand, some transport and meat companies issued communications to inform customers and workers about new occupational hygiene measures. There is indeed a link between the need to address specific problems to ensure the supply of basic necessities and their effect on resilience. However, it is clear that not all the SMEs analysed responded quickly and resiliently to the problems caused by confinement. Consequently, we can affirm that there is a percentage of companies that, faced with a given problem, do demonstrate this capacity to react and adapt to the new situation in order to maintain the supply chain.

It should be taken into consideration that resilience is the materialization of a solution to a given problem. this implies manpower. Table 9 shows the companies distributed by size, highlighting those that have been most resilient. In this study the companies with the highest number of employees are supermarkets -C26 and 20- and with the highest resilience. It is found that for resilience the size of the company tends to be medium, but more interesting to note is that in the case of a number of small and some medium sized enterprises with under 100 employees are in the top 10 most resilient companies. A larger number of employees helps resilience but it does not guarantee it.

Table 9. Size of SMEs.

Medium (<250)	Small (<50)	Micro (<10)
C26	C18	C27
C20	C30	C14
C21	**C10**	-
C25	C5	-
C7	C2	-
C23	C29	-
C4	-	-
C16	-	-
C11	-	-
C19	-	-
C8	-	-
C24	-	-
C22	-	-
C15	-	-
C17	-	-

Finally, in order to gain a general view of the situation of companies in the "Food & Drink" sector according to their strategic models, they were represented in the form of a graph (Figure 9). Attention is drawn to those SMEs that explicitly reference sustainability in their communications. On the whole they apply communicative strategies with future projection such as reputation, thought leadership and trust.
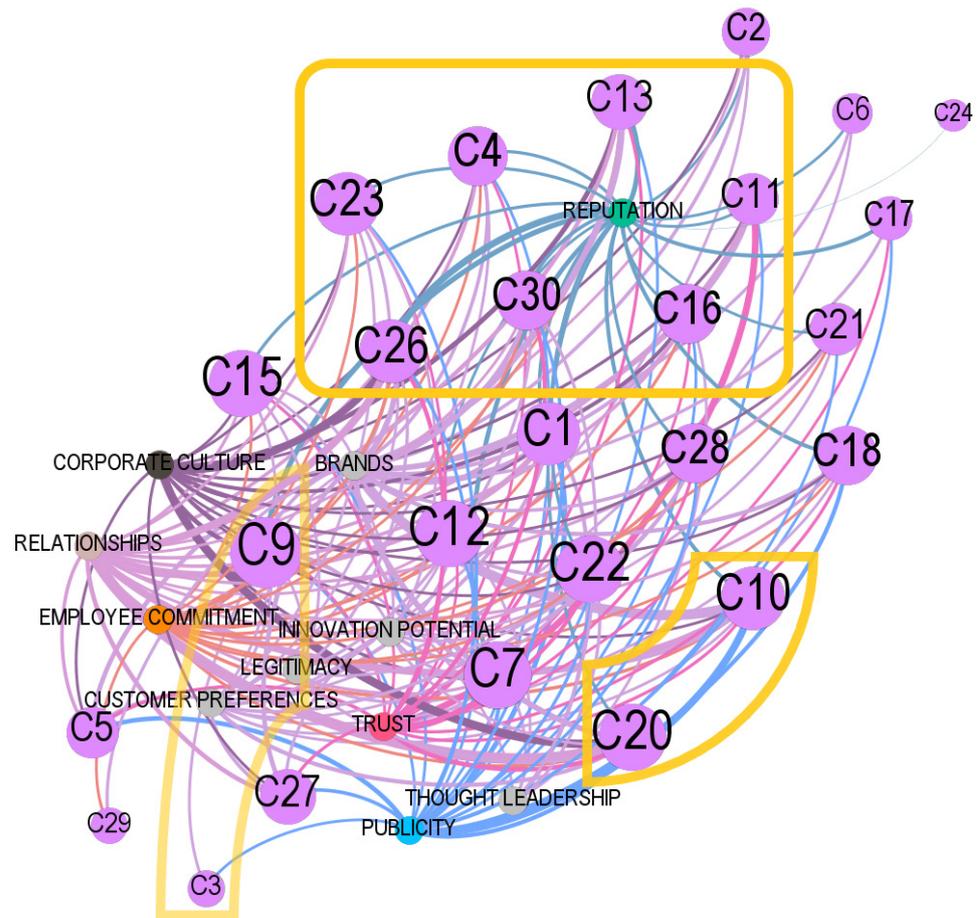
Figure 9. Graph of SMEs and their relationship with communicative strategies.

4.6. RQ 6: Can Any Support or Empathy from the "Food & Drink" Sector to the "Tourism" Sector by SMEs Messages Be Identified?

Of the messages identified in the previous phase, a semantic analysis was carried out to extract the expressions of support for services sectors such as, by way of example, tourism and hospitality. Almost half (43.3%) of the companies mentioned the tourism sector in their communications in relation to concepts linked to safety, responsibility and support by institutions (Figure 10). Mention of the tourism sector was generally through a single medium, mainly the blog (44.83%), followed by website sections −24.14% in the case of press and 6.9% in news, whereas social networks accounted for a quarter of such communications—Facebook 13.79% and Twitter 10.34%. Just 10% used Facebook in combination with a blog or the press section of the website -C1 and C21, oil and salad producers, respectively—to send messages that mentioned the tourism sector. This group also includes C51—a supermarket—which used the three aforementioned communication channels.
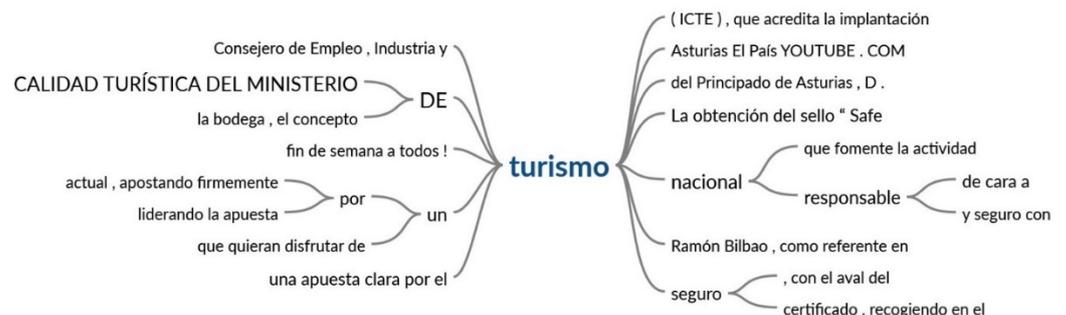

Figure 10. Semantic contexts for tourism.

The choice of a sample of cases in a single sector allowed us to identify relatively homogenous behavioural patterns. We wanted to contrast them with the SMEs from the other sectors. Firstly, it was observed that a mere 20% of the companies made some type of mention of tourism (compared to 43.3% for "Food & Drink"). These 9 companies are found in sectors as diverse as: pharmaceutical laboratories, healthcare, energy, education, transport, manufacturing, business services and wholesale. In addition, the homogeneity of the cases analysed allows us to state that the "Food & Drink" sector used the blog to communicate its messages that mention tourism, and that some businesses had an information section on everything related to COVID-19, including mention of affected sectors. In contrast, the comparison in Table 10 indicates that, although similar patterns of behaviour exist in SMEs from other sectors, such as blog use, the percentage of website use is slightly higher. It does nevertheless confirm the strong connection of the "Food & Drink" sector to the tourism sector, and its support towards it.

Table 10. Communication channels of "tourism" mentions (Food & Drink versus other sectors).

SECTOR	Blog	Website Press	Website News	COVID Section	Facebook	Twitter
F&D	13.04%		2.17%	4.35%	8.70%	4.35%
Other Sectors	28.26%	17.39%	4.35%		10.87%	6.52%

Continuing with the analysis of our dataset from the "Food & Drink" sector, the term sustainability or one of its variants are mentioned by 40% of the SMEs. It appears most frequently in the blog (58%)—followed by Facebook (58%) and the website (17%)—in contexts relating to tourism or the environment (Figure 11). The words which co-occurrence with sustainability are: responsibility, support, improvement, gastronomy, "safe tourism", energy efficiency and recycling.

Figure 11. Semantic contexts for sustainability.

5. Discussion

This section discusses the main findings of the research paper based on the theory of strategic communication, resilience capability, corporate social responsibility of SMEs from "Food & Drink" sector, and the relation between this and the "Tourism" sector.

The COVID-19 pandemic situation, above all when lockdown was declared in Spain, has become one of the most obvious crisis resilience contexts for the business world, espe-cially in SMEs. In the "Food and Drinks" sector, real efforts were made to maintain the supply chain [27,92,93]. These SMEs put into practice their capacity for resilience and flexibility using digital communication to maintain engagement with customers, employees and other members of the community.

The findings of this study have implications regarding the importance of identifying communication mechanisms and strategy patterns suggesting recommendations for improving SME communication with customers and other stakeholders. These different strategies reflect a necessary interaction with people whose only connection to other people and businesses was the internet [7,94].

In the second phase, the qualitative analysis of the content of the 2.0 messages is the method to, firstly, determine the relationship between the resilience capacity and the corporative social responsibility of the SMEs studied that drive social and economic sustainability; and secondly, recognize the more resilient SMEs in graphic form.

Finally, this content analysis allows to bring to light underlying relationship between "food and drink" and tourism sectors and identify corporative social responsibility actions.

The results of this study show the importance of optimal strategic communication for resilient SMEs to spread their innovations—in a broad sense; and to maintain sustainable attitude-supply chain, engagement etc. in any future crisis. It was confirmed that online communication to customers is essential for making them aware of actions and information. Among other strategic communications, these messages reflect resilience, in the case of the creation of new services or products [95] and integrating new procedures (remote working, implementation of new health protocols [96] or corporate social responsibility to overcome the obstacles imposed by the health crisis situation.

This qualitative analysis is useful for drawing the attention of SMEs to the changes they can adopt to improve their communication patterns or behaviours, and how an innovative SME should be both regarding actions and in communication.

Most studies on small and medium-sized enterprises are carried out on their formal variables or characteristics: economic sector, size, geographical area, etc. However, this qualitative analysis shows findings from a corporate behavioural perspective and it is characterized with variables such as size and sector. These corporate attitudes are reflected in the different communication strategies materialised through messages; therefore, we consider from this study that the relationship between SMEs from a certain sector, and therefore with similar characteristics, have acted differently in terms of social responsibility.

The results of the message content analysis in this study indicate that innovation capability and resilience are factors that significantly influence the performance of SMEs, and we can establish a relationship between SME capacity to manage communications through various mechanisms including social media and capacity for resilience. These communicative strategies are not, however, evident in all the companies considered innovative.

The fact that almost 17% of SMEs failed to send any type of message could have been due to communication problems caused by the lockdown situation. To respond to this question, in 2022 and with the return to normality, we accessed their websites. It was discovered that none of them have a blog, and half have a news section that is not used. In other cases, publications were reactivated in September 2020 without any type of reference to the health crisis. Only one of them -C8, has increased its catalogue of products—coffee, sweeteners, nuts, snacks, . . . to now include hygiene masks and hydro-alcoholic gel. The conclusion for this subgroup of SMEs is that a decision has been taken to maintain a disregard for or distance from customers, and to exclusively maintain a strict vision as regards company products and services. In consequence, it shows a complete lack of capacity for either communication with customers or for adaptation and resilience.

This paper has served to confirm other studies, which looked at the number of communication mechanisms or channels before and after lockdown [91] compared to the use of these channels for communicating messages, either from various strategic perspectives as in our case, or from the perspective of the marketing of contents [5,7]. It is most interesting to observe the adaptation of digital channels for communication by SMEs without differences arising due to sector—"Food & Drink" vs. Dentistry"—or country—Spain vs. Romania.

A behavioural pattern that particularly stands out is the frequent use of social networks, especially Facebook [97], for content marketing. This work identified that the strategy corresponding to the advertising of new products was that which most relied on

social networks for its promotion. It is probable that other discrepancies are due to the data col-lection method (web scraping and dumping of messages originating from social networks, compared to the analysis of questionnaires).

It is no coincidence that the SMEs with more communication channels also send a greater number of messages than those that fit in the centre of the group of companies that are more active, resilient and in contact with their customers during lockdown. The results indicate that a minimum communication, of around 12 messages during the period analysed, is necessary in order to be able to apply the different strategies from the communication value circle.

The importance of maintaining communication (relationships) for engaging with customers is confirmed. Supermarkets and a salad company particularly stand out as the most active cases. The most used communicative strategies are still those that refer to company image, but these are followed by those with future projection. Reputation is related to current and future values of the company such as, for example, solidarity. Another example would be trust, closely linked to credibility and integrity (social responsibility). The category denominated "Innovation potential" is closely related to resilience due to its dedication towards the creation of new products and services that adapt to immediate and future needs. Although the two that follow are lesser used strategic categories, they are highly illustrative for reflecting sustainability actions. One of these is "thought leadership", which in this study materialises the 50% of SMEs that directly support or request support from other intermediary sectors such as hospitality, asking that they consume such services. This help implies an activation of the economy and is circular in nature, given that consumption in these sectors involves support for the company supplying the products and which is found in the "Food & Drink" sector. The possibility of attention being paid to this request is closely linked to legitimacy. In short, there are communicative strategies that are intimately related and that, due to their potential, are less used than those of a more immediate nature such as advertising.

The results show the commitment and social responsibility of these SMEs and their capacity for resilience via actions that facilitate social and economic sustainability through their corporate messages, which are aimed at their customers and the population at large. Our contribution has been to carry out a study with direct sources; in other words, basing it on information communicated by companies during the time of crisis compared to the data from reports created a posteriori [98].

Attention may be drawn not only to the quantity of messages sent, but also the variety of content, given that the greatest relationship between these companies and the tourism sector originates from businesses that are active in all of the communicative strategies. Despite the forced inactivity in tourism during this period, the messages undoubtedly reflect the relationship with and support for this sector.

We coincide with Guitarro et al. [99] in that messages with an emotional content are distributed on social networks. However, the majority of messages with a social content, both regarding awareness-raising in the following of health measures and the transmission of trust via specific services and information on the situation come from the website itself, and the news section in particular. It is deduced that the website is the reference point for communication between SMEs and their customers. A future study might be orientated towards discovering whether these communications originating from the website have repercussion on social networks via comments in response or reposting, or, in contrast, whether only those messages sent via each social network provoke reactions. It would also be quite enriching to ascertain whether the quantity of messages received from the company determines the response or reaction on the part of customers or whether the type of communicative strategy used is more of a determining factor.

This study supports our initial hypothesis that the SMEs considered as innovative by the London Stock Exchange Group were resilient and active in strategic communication. However, the study discovered that 16.7% of these SMEs did not express any kind of reaction by messaging 2.0.

In conclusion, this percentage of companies should be encouraged to use and diversify their communications through several channels. 16.7% of small businesses did not carry out any type of communication during the lockdown through any channel. And only 6.7% of companies maintained multi-channel communication through the four channels used in this study. However, it should be noted that more than half of the companies (53%) carried out multi-channel communications, i.e., at least two channels.

The communications to employees identified are closely related on the one hand to the management crisis, as it has a job security perspective (which implies a message to families and customers on a second level of recipients), and, on the other hand, with community relations through the announcement of solidarity actions [47].

This study supports our initial hypothesis that resilience and corporate social responsibility reflected in strategic communication can help to build sustainable competitive advantage. It confirms that support to the tourism sector in general and the restaurant and hospitality sector in particular by the strategic communication category "thought leadership" if there were any messages calling for sustainability support to hospitality and restaurant businesses. And it is known that there is a link between restaurants and their gastronomy and tourism [100].

A contribution of this article is the proposal of a model which uses strategic communication elements and adds other more precise categories to identify resilience and CSR. However, when looked at in more depth, a greater degree of precision or concreteness is needed in the coding of messages in order to correctly identify those related to resilience or corporate social responsibility. Fundamentally, these communications are divided on the one hand into those that seek some marketing objective or customer loyalty and that, adapted to times of crisis, would be linked to behavioural resilience and, on the other hand, the broadcasting of messages directly related to the emotional and relational dimension of resilience.

Resilience capability is also proven to be a significant variable for the strengthening of the SME and the fact it is reflected in strategic communication identifies the different perspectives in which communication is used to achieve different objectives in the short and medium term.

Resilience and corporate social responsibility are so closely linked that in our study it has not been possible to make an absolute division between the two aspects. Resilience may have more aspects, such as the capacity for innovation for the creation of new products and services that on the one hand respond to the needs or desires of customers and on the other achieve one of the main strategic objectives of a company, which is that customers consume the products offered by the company in the short term, and in the medium and long term reinforce other strategic objectives such as trust, engagement and reputation.

Contrary to theory, the boundaries of communication are blurred or intersect under different categories. Thus, messages categorised as an invitation to intermediate conversion reflect both resilience and the identification of a problem, such as for example the closure of hotels and restaurants in the tourism sector. The solutions proposed by the companies fall within the scope of corporate social responsibility by supporting a sector such as the tourism sector to which the company supplies products. Moreover, this resilience can be financial-for example, projects . . . -or behavioural-inviting or motivating customers to return to restaurants, bars, hotels, etc.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The market is moving towards greater interaction with consumers in order to understand their needs and to be able to offer products and services that are tailored to them; and also, to achieve future benefits—e.g., good reputation and legitimacy-and to receive a behavioural and attitudinal loyalty response from customers.

Communication strategies, embodied in the content published through digital communication, allow SMEs to maintain their presence and show their capacity for resilience and corporate social responsibility in crisis situations-in this case, the health crisis. The new

market takes the consumer as a reference point, and from there, it is possible to generate products and services that form the economic basis of the company, but without forgetting the social context. This is why resilience and perspectives thereof-behavioural, emotional and relational-are fundamental, and are transmitted through content that reflects empathy and emotionality. As was evident during lockdown, loneliness, uncertainty, lack of information and discouragement were, among others, consumer needs.

Companies are increasingly using the communicative strategies presented in this paper to relate to their customers and other actors in the environment. In this study it has being discovered that resilience varies according to SME type. Producers and manufacturers address their messages both directly to customers-emotional resilience, publicity of their products, creation of new products tailored to their needs-and to partners—e.g., carriers-and retailers-restaurants, bars, supermarkets . . . . Retail distributors, on the other hand, target customers and apply more communication strategies in order to secure the supply chain, among other reasons.

However, it must be pointed out that in order for this communication to be possible, a minimum of resources-economic and, above all, human-are necessary. This research paper has shown that there is a threshold beyond which the company no longer demonstrates capacity for resilience or CSR; therefore, it can be deduced that company size, in terms of employee numbers, is a determining factor in the implementation of communication.

The future Market implies increased more multi-channel communication at a global level, especially as regards consumers. Consequently, it will be necessary for SMEs to include this trend in their new planning, which will be essential to ensure their robustness and resilience in the face of any future crises.

Regarding practical implications, there should be a reconsidering of resilience and CSR by SMEs during and after a crisis. It is a fact in the light of the results obtained in this paper that small and medium enterprises have resilience capacity and communication capacity. On the contrary, it is probable that micro-enterprises have a lower resilience capacity, as they are unable to invest in change with novelties while maintaining the rhythm of work, implying that in the case of resilience capacity, they have labour shortage in terms of staff dedicated to communication tasks. Furthermore, the companies identified as potentially innovative according to the London Stock Exchange Group should analyse their communication behaviour patterns and identify their weak points following the model proposed in this work, and thus strengthen their communication strategies and their multichannel management.

The aim of this study is to identify components related to strategic communication and innovation so that SMEs can transform their structures or workflows to enable them to adapt with a rapid response time to any crisis.

Limitations and Future Avenues

As with any study, this one is not without limitations. This study has been restricted by the need to analyse a single sector with a representative volume of SMEs. It has only been carried out on the "Food & Drink" sector of the 100 most innovating Spanish SMEs in the year 2018.

It would be interesting to widen the study to sectors in which a representative number of SMEs is found. For this to occur there would need to be an increase in the number of companies to be researched, both those considered as innovating and those not found in any ranking.

In the case of the employee commitment analysis, we can only talk about the communications issued by the company during confinement. During this period of time we also identify a link between this situation, and therefore resilient reactions, with a unanimous reaction of the company and the employees with corporate and employee in-volvement in what we call a CSR action—e.g., donations and collections.

Therefore, we can establish a relationship between an SME's ability to manage its communications through various mechanisms, including social media, and its resilience.

It would be necessary to expand the number of cases to study the possible correlation be-tween the two variables.

We have observed the relationship between the frequency and type of channels used with the number of communication strategies employed, but it is not possible to demonstrate a correlation with the number of cases in our study. Furthermore, the companies that stand out for a greater number of communication channels used have been identified as the most resilient and/or sustainability-aware. This limitation could be solved by ex-tending this study to a greater number of companies.

This study proposes an analysis of contents that, despite the methodological difference with other studies [29,98], confirms the need for a qualitative perspective as regards business communication studies.

Following this investigation, it would be interesting to resolve in the future the question of whether company size might be a determining factor when using specific elements of strategic communication or, likewise, whether the frequency in use of strategic communication elements by an SME should be similar to those of a large company.

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