# Instant messaging as an informative source in organizational communication: WhatsApp Business in Mexico and Spain

*La mensajería instantánea como fuente informativa en la comunicación organizacional: WhatsApp Business en México y España*

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WhatsApp is the most used messaging service in Mexico and Spain. This research is innovative in evaluating the implementation and interaction mechanisms of WhatsApp Business, a specific version of the app that has been created for companies. From a sample made up of 200 companies, presented here is a comparative study of both countries. The results show a low level of implementation and significant deficiencies in dialogic development. Hence, the need to adapt to the usual spaces of citizen participation is identified.

KEYWORDS: Instant messaging services, mobile marketing, WhatsApp, WhatsApp Business.

WhatsApp es el servicio de mensajería más empleado en México y en España. Esta investigación es pionera en evaluar la implantación y los mecanismos de interacción de WhatsApp Business, la versión específica que la aplicación ha creado para las organizaciones. A partir de una muestra compuesta por 200 empresas, los resultados presentan un estudio comparativo entre ambos países. Las conclusiones apuntan a un nivel bajo de implementación y carencias significativas en el desarrollo dialógico, por lo que se diagnostica la necesidad de adaptarse a los espacios habituales de participación ciudadana.

PALABRAS CLAVE: Servicios de mensajería instantánea, marketing móvil, WhatsApp, WhatsApp Business.

PRESENTATION

The latest data on social audiences (We Are Social & Hootsuite, 2019) indicate that 45% of the world's population, some 3.5 billion people, are users of social networks, and that the number of unique mobile phone users (5 112 million) exceeds that of Internet users (4 338 million). In America there are 1 058 million mobile subscribers (104% of the population), which implies a growth of 0.9% in the last year. In comparison, in Europe the figure is 1 111 million (130% of the population), although growth in the last year was lower, at 0.5%.

In Mexico, six out of ten people (67%) use the Internet, and in Spain the figure is higher, at nine out of ten (93%). The average global consumption time of mobile Internet continues to increase, standing at 3 hours and 14 minutes. This is a 4.3% increase from 2018 (3 hours and 50 minutes in Mexico, and 2 hours and 11 minutes in Spain). The time that users dedicate to social interactions has also increased by 6.1% compared to last year, while 42% of the world's population (3 256 million people) are now active users who access social spaces through mobile phones. The average penetration of social networks on the planet is 45%, 9% more than the previous year, although in Spain it is higher, at 60%, and 67% in Mexico.

98% of Internet users claim to have connected to a social network or to have used an instant messaging service in the last month, and 83% state having participated actively in these spaces, that is, not only consulting content, but also creating it. Each Internet user has an average of 8.9 active accounts on social networks (7.9 in Spain and 10.3 in Mexico), dedicating 2 hours and 16 minutes to them every day, although in Spain that figure drops to 1 hour and 39 minutes and in Mexico it sits higher, at 3 hours and 12 minutes.

Facebook continues to be the most important and active social platform on the planet with 2 271 million users. YouTube is the second (1.9 billion users) and WhatsApp the third (1.3 billion users). WhatsApp is the most used instant messaging service in 133 countries, with Facebook Messenger being the most used in 75 countries, coming in a distant second. Unique mobile phone users make up 67% of the world's population and make a total of 8 842 million daily connections, 4.2%

more than last year, which is equivalent to 115% in the global group (117% in Spain and 84% in Mexico). Of these, seven out of ten (71%) are carried out using 3G or 4G technologies. In Latin America, 2.09 million gigabytes were consumed in 2019, while the number in Europe was 4.87 million. Both cases represent an increase of 45% compared to 2018. That same year, 194 million apps were downloaded.

In relation to the purchasing habits of users, 84% acknowledge having searched for a product on the Internet during the last month, and 91% having visited a retail e-commerce platform. 75% (72% in Spain and 65% in Mexico) ended up buying a product online. Of that 75%, 42% used the computer to make the purchase, while 55% used their mobile phone (40% in Spain and 46% in Mexico). Sales in electronics or technology companies reached 463.16 million dollars (392.6 million in electronics and 70.56 million in video games).

The above data surely proves that the rise of mobile telephony, instant messaging applications and electronic commerce are unstoppable. Companies cannot afford to ignore these realities. It is more necessary than ever for them to fully integrate into 2.0 markets; those characterized by a 24/7 broadcast system, bidirectionality between brands and audiences, the interference in private spaces of social communication, a multiplicity of formats and platforms, the relevance of geolocation, and the rupture of physical and temporal spaces (Sixto, 2018). As organizations cannot survive in isolation without talking to the public, they must create and maintain a climate of empathy that resolves the demands and aspirations of the user community. This is even more essential when the market is beset by the diversity of offers and companies (Hoyos & Lasso de la Vega, 2017).

Aware of this need, in January 2018, the administrators of WhatsApp (the most widely used instant messaging service in the world) launched WhatsApp Business (WB), a specific application programming interface (API) created to help companies to meet the needs of their customers, and deal with their inquiries. At first WB was only available in Indonesia, Italy, Mexico, the United Kingdom and the United States. However, today it is available in all countries and is offered for both Android and iOS. WhatsApp has also announced that it is designing new tools for large-scale companies such as airlines or banks.

In this context, questions arise, these same questions form the basis of this investigation. For example, do Mexican and Spanish companies provide a WhatsApp number so that customers can contact them? Is it an ordinary WhatsApp account or is the Business version for companies used? Are the user inquiries actually answered?

## WHATSAPP, THE WORLD'S LEADING MESSAGING APP

WhatsApp is not a social network, since users do not use it to share publications. Also, it only allows one of the two basic functions that are required of a social network, linking people (being in contact with people that the user already knows), but not finding people (meeting or looking for people based on personal interests) (Monsoriu, 2009; Navarro, 2004). The latter function isn't implemented at all, not even based on the recommendations of other users. Furthermore, WhatsApp doesn't allow options common to all social networks such as leaving comments, liking or following the publications of other users by scrolling. Instead, the app serves to promote dialogue between users, mostly on an individual level. Therefore, there are substantial differences between actual social networks and Whatsapp. These differences affect the consumption model of the latter, both with regard to the product (limited only to messaging) and the way that it is consumed (it revolves around dialogue, so that the user already knows beforehand what will be found on the platform). These differences also shape production, as no other network requires users to have such a high level of participation, since accesses only make sense from a dialogic perspective, rather than as passive reception of content (Sixto, 2018).

WhatsApp is, therefore, a messaging service. It has been recognized as such by reputed social auditors such as the creative agency We Are Social, as well as Hootsuite, the leading platform in management of social networks. Each year, the two work together to produce their report, named *Digital*, on digital trends and social networks around the world. With 1.5 billion users, the rise and consolidation of WhatsApp globally is clearly demonstrated, even more when growth volume is considered, as five years ago, in 2014, WhatsApp had only 600 million

(Statista Research Department, 2016). Within social platforms, only Facebook and YouTube host a greater number of users. Nonetheless, as a messaging service, WhatsApp's leadership is indisputed, with 200 million users more than second place Facebook Messenger (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1

GLOBAL AUDIENCE ON SOCIAL PLATAFORMS
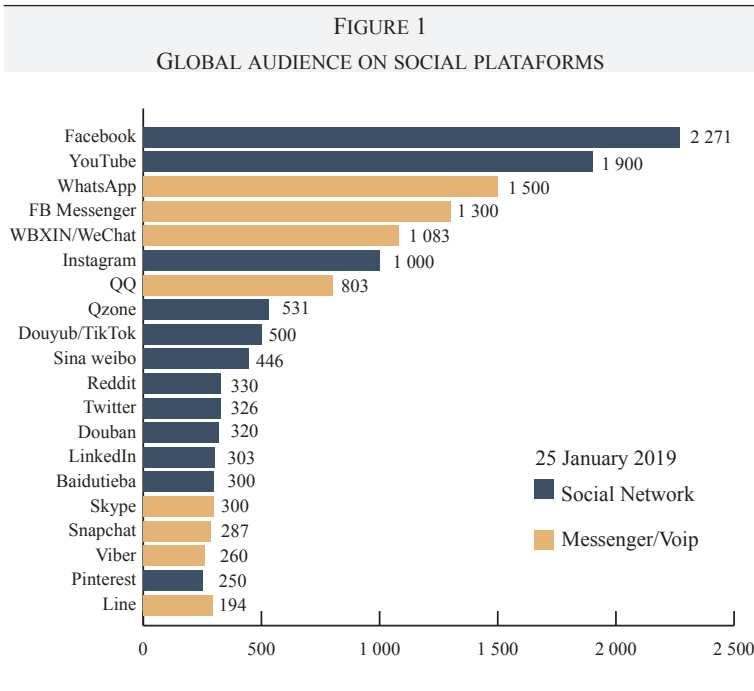


Source: We Are Social & Hootsuite (2019).

Both in Mexico and Spain, 87% of Internet users say they use WhatsApp, which means that it is also the most used messaging service in both countries, the third most active social platform in Mexico and the second in Spain (Figures 2 and 3).

The comunication effectiveness with which WhatsApp enables connections and interactions between organizations and users has been analyzed and verified in different sectors. These include public libraries (Arnau et al., 2016; Macías, 2017), the media (Fares, 2018; Giraldo & Cardona, 2018; Quiroz, 2015), education (Fondevila-

FIGURE 2

SOCIAL AUDIENCES IN MEXICO

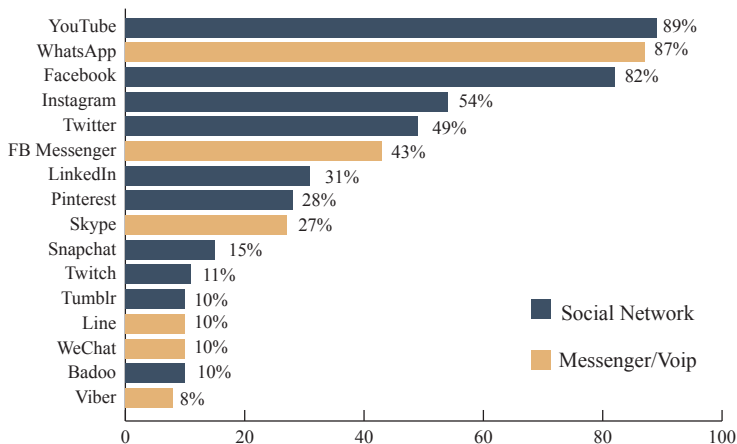| Platform | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|
| YouTube | 95% |
| Facebook | 93% |
| WhatsApp | 87% |
| FB Messenger | 74% |
| Instagram | 64% |
| Twitter | 57% |
| Pinterest | 40% |
| Skype | 34% |
| LinkedIn | 33% |
| Snapchat | 31% |
| Taringa | 22% |
| Tumblr | 22% |
| WeChat | 21% |
| Twitch | 20% |
| Line | 18% |
| Badoo | 18% |

■ Social Network
■ Messenger/Voip
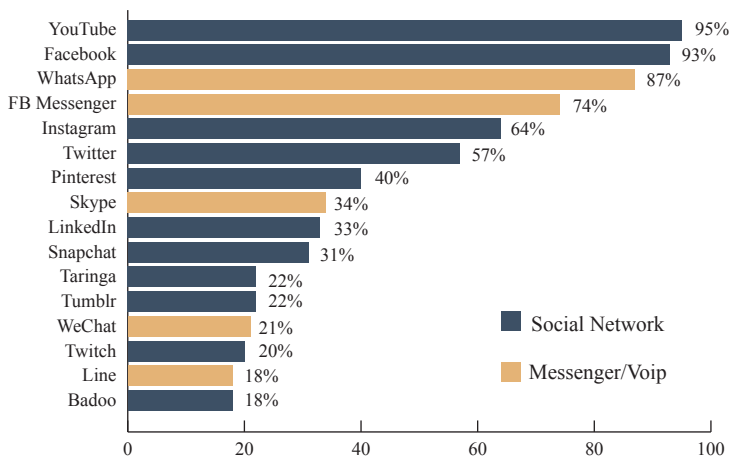
Source: We Are Social & Hootsuite (2019).

FIGURE 3

SOCIAL AUDIENCES IN SPAIN

| Platform | Percentage |
|----------|-----------|
| YouTube | 89% |
| WhatsApp | 87% |
| Facebook | 82% |
| Instagram | 54% |
| Twitter | 49% |
| FB Messenger | 43% |
| LinkedIn | 31% |
| Pinterest | 28% |
| Skype | 27% |
| Snapchat | 15% |
| Twitch | 11% |
| Tumblr | 10% |
| Line | 10% |
| WeChat | 10% |
| Badoo | 10% |
| Viber | 8% |

■ Social Network
■ Messenger/Voip

Source: We Are Social & Hootsuite (2019).

Gascón et al., 2019; Gómez del Castillo, 2017; Monguillot et al., 2017; Suárez, 2017), language learning (Morató, 2014), and even as a tool to improve the health of the elderly (Muntaner-Mas et al., 2015). Studies on WhatsApp's potential in the business environment are scarce, though research on how to carry out a marketing campaign using the application was found (Rodríguez, 2016), as was research on its use in Brazilian supermarkets (Dutra et al. , 2019). In the latter case, the researchers noted how Whatsapp was being used as a strategic platform in the search for clients, to guarantee a competitive advantage in the market, and as a means for the dissemination of advertising and promotions. The speed and efficiency of these distribution processes facilitate the achievement of organizational objectives.

Other previous research on WhatsApp has focused on its potential to broadcast communications from the sending source to the receiving publics. In relation to this, Dutra et al. (2019) found that WhatsApp streamlines communication with customers, minimizes combat action from competitors, makes it possible to establish greater contact with the customer, facilitates the sale of perishable products, increases the generation of value perceived by the user. This means that users ultimately perceive the company as one that cares about satisying their needs. Aquino et al. (2014) concluded that microenterprises and SMEs that use WhatsApp enjoy greater practicality by being able to send interested customers images of the products. This avoids unnecessary travel and facilitates the resolution of doubts related to functionalities or services.

## WhatsApp within the Online Mobile Marketing Strategy

Organizations use WhatsApp as part of their mobile marketing strategies. In its latest definition, the American Marketing Association (2017) describes marketing as "the activity, the set of institutions and the processes to create, communicate and exchange offers that have value for customers, clients, partners and society at large" (n.p.). Therefore, mobile marketing must make use of mobile devices to revalue products for those who sell, produce, distribute and consume them. Furthermore, in line with current policies of social responsibility and transparency, mobile marketing should contribute to the betterment

of society as a whole. The Mobile Marketing Association (2009) defined mobile marketing as "the set of practices that enables organizations to communicate and engage with their audience in an interactive and relevant manner through and with any mobile device or network" (n.p.).

In the review of the academic literature, different terminologies are found to refer to the same concept: mobile marketing, viral mobile marketing, mobile advertising, m-advertising, mobile mk, wireless advertising or wireless advertising messaging (Aguado & García, 2014; Haig, 2002; Kotler & Armstrong, 2006; Michael & Salter, 2006). If we start from the hypothesis that "mobile platforms are not only a means of communication for individuals, but for brands, then any commercial action carried out under these terms and using mobile devices as a communication channel would be included within the definition of marketing" (Gómez, 2012, p. 241).

Kotler (2011) identified five communication models from the marketing communication mix: propaganda, sales promotion, public relations and advertising, personal selling and direct marketing. Following his proposal, mobile marketing would be clearly linked to direct marketing as it requires the use of auxiliary means such as the telephone or the Internet to carry out transactions. It could also be linked to personal sales if, through WhatsApp for example, a personalized service is offered that can convert users into potential buyers. In fact, product customization has allowed for the consolidation of one-to-one marketing over the past decade. Even today, there are co-creation practices in which the public actively participates in the ideation, development and marketing of products. As far back as 2001, Castells advised on the need to offer users highly credible information as the Internet consolidated itself as the main source of information in various parts of the world. Kotler et al. (2011) clarified that the rise of social media is a reflection of the migration of consumer trust from companies to other consumers.

Among the characteristics of mobile marketing, Melendo (2011) cataloged ubiquity, interaction, immediacy, virality, synchrony between senders and receivers, and the ease of integrating into any global marketing strategy. This seemed to confirm mobile marketing's usefulness in promotional actions, in carrying out advertising, in

developing *advergaming*, in loyalty campaigns, in building brand image, in implementing *m-commerce* and in conducting market analysis. Aguado and García (2014) specified that factors such as personalization, temporary availability, geolocation, multi-directionality, socialization and segmentation facilitate the effectiveness of mobile marketing. Their work also points to the evolution of the one-to-one and one-to-many models towards a one-to-world system, which, although it was believed to be useful at the time in certain forms of mobile broadcasting such as SMS, is not recommended for current relationships between brands and users, where relationships must become increasingly closer and nurture the structuring of nano-niches. Indeed, recent research confirms that:

> The development, curation and dissemination of content is one of the axes of the strategic planning of the new economy that has a *growth hacker* vision, focused on growth, and that combines advertising, public relations and digital marketing actions to achieve it (Coll, 2019, p. 106).

## WHATSAPP BUSINESS IN ORGANIZATIONAL COMMUNICATION

The first competitive advantage of implementing WhatsApp in contemporary marketing strategies lies in the volume of WhatsApp users. One of the most successful trends in modern marketing relies on the brand penetrating daily participation spaces of the public, so that the organization becomes part of the user's contact network. With this approach, the user does not have to make an additional effort to connect with brands, but rather the brands seek out their targets and adapt corporate storytelling to their needs (Kotler, 2018; Sixto, 2018).

The second benefit that Whatsapp offers is the immediacy of its communicative power. The current amount of information available is so great that on many occasions it leads to *infoxication*, that is, an information overload that prevents the users from accessing that specific information needed to meet their needs. In this scenario, the user not only waits for a response from the organization, but expects an answer that is as fast and clear as possible. E-mails or contact forms take more effort and decrease the effectiveness of call to action practices (to attract potential audiences) due to their asynchrony. On the other hand,

WhatsApp combats impatience and, therefore, must offer a solution even before other social media. Those that use the application to contact a company require an immediate response, many times linked to an impulse purchase that, if not answered in time, will end up going to the competition.

In this dialogue with the publics, organizations can use audio messages, emoticons, videos, photographs or video calls to show the products and/or explain how to use them. Relating to this, the third competitive advantage has to do with the establishment of a one-to-one multimedia marketing system that offers individualized responses that go beyond text and orality and that, by inverting the traditional marketing paradigms, provide a different offer for each particular demand. In fact, web 2.0 has altered the behavioral habits of consumers, who now prefer to write than to make a phone call. They view the written dialogue as more intimate, confidential, credible and secure as the conversation is recorded in writing. Thus, it is always advisable to authorize read confirmations with a blue check mark so that the users can be sure that their message has been read, though of course also means that the query must be answered upon being read. Generations Y and Z rarely resort to telephone consultations, and increasingly express an aversion to robotic telephone assistance services that detract from personalization, especially those in which the user is forced to speak to machines instead of people (Sixto, 2018).

The Business version of Whatsapp adds components that complement and reinforce those of the original model. That a company avails themselves of WhatsApp in their communication already implies a certain level of innovation. Nonetheless, it is advised that companies use the specific version for businesses, so that the strengths and opportunities that the application provides are maximized:

1. *Consolidation of corporate image*. In the WB account settings, the profile photo must correspond to the organization's logo or a representative image that showcases the brand. Likewise, the information section must be visible to everyone (not only to contacts), and include a sentence that is consistent with corporate culture, like a slogan. If possible, the information

section should provide descriptive data that contribute additional value. It is also advisable to indicate the category in which the company is included from those offered by the app (food and grocery, automotive, banking and finance, beauty, spa and salon, shopping and retail, education, entertainment, hotel and lodging, medical and health, event planning and service, restaurant, clothing and apparel, professional services, non-profit, travel and transportation, other). Unlike personal accounts, WB allows to add a contact e-mail and one or more corporate web pages, so that the user not only has the option of establishing a synchronous contact, but can also reinforce the information in other corporate spaces. In doing so, the rigor of asynchrony is given precedence over the immediacy of the response.

2. *Establishment of customer service hours*. The fact that a company uses WhatsApp does not mean that it has to reply to messages 24 hours a day, 365 a year. In fact, the app suggests following conventional customer service hours applicable to telephone lines or face-to-face services, as well as respecting non-working days (WhatsApp, 2020). Not doing so, apart from being an obstacle for small and medium-sized companies, gives users a feeling of suspicion. The exceptions might be found in the e-commerce giants that distribute worldwide. The global nature of their operations would justify the resolution of queries and concerns based on the different international time zones.

3. *Geolocation*. Geolocation facilitates the exploitation of ubiquity and offers users relevant and personalized content based on their spatial-temporal location. Geolocatable organizations appear more credible to the publics, and also more accessible. For this reason, WB makes it possible to geolocate companies on Google Maps, which allows consumers to easily find out how to get to the company, either on foot or by using the means of transport that are available in that area. In the spaces for dialogue established by WB, the contents are personalized for each user based on their location, which makes it possible to implement specific targeting strategies for each location and for each user located in each of them. If there is dialogue with the user, WhatsApp also gives

organizations the opportunity to send the location of the company by message. Thus, any customer who makes a query can follow Google Maps' directions and go to the office in person. This could be compared to having the ability in the 1.0 era to hand-deliver a map to any customer unsuccessfully trying to find us, but with the difference that now the map speaks and guides that customer. This clearly refers to a B2C (business to consumer) strategy that could be transformed into B2B (business to business) when used to contact suppliers or other companies that act as distributors of the company's products.

4. *Direct link for transmedia storytelling.* The business version allows customers to send a direct URL that they can use to start a chat with the organization without using a mobile or a phone number. Instead, it can be sent via either e-mail, social networks or using Bluetooth. Additionally, this option offers the ability to create a default message that customers can edit and send when opening the direct link. The business exploitation of transmedia narratives can be seen here, as the dialogue begins in spaces outside of WhatsApp, though later *cross-content* behaviors are reproduced when returning to the app.

5. *Automation of responses*. To aid business management, WB offers organizations three messaging tools related to content automation: 1) away messages to send outside of business hours, 2) the option to create automatic greeting messages to send to users who make contact for the first time or after 14 days of no activity, 3) quick responses to answer the most common queries. In regards to the final feature, it is always preferable to offer a committed, respectful and personalized response in order to avoid damaging the organization's public image, provided that the volume of conversations and available human resources allow it.

6. *Classification of information*. The app allows to catalog and organize conversations using a tag system, which can be customized for each company. Up to twenty categories can be added. Those provided by default are the following: new customer, new order, pending payment, paid and order complete. It is possible to create catalogs and distribution lists for specific contacts grouped in each

of the labels. With this, information can be offered that is likely to increase *engagement*. This kind of outreach is less likely to be interpreted as *spam* or intrusive content.

7. *Hierarchy of information*. Apart from classification by labeling, WB allows users to bookmark relevant messages in conversations. This makes it much easier to quickly access that content without having to waste time searching through chats. This functionality is especially valuable in dealing with specific needs and in retrieving information in the event of a complaint or customer dissatisfaction. In any case, it is also possible to export conversations to other spaces, including cloud storage, and to archive all chats.

8. *Self-destructing content*. WhatsApp statuses allow companies to create 24 hour self-destructing ephemeral content. This same feature exists on Instagram and Facebook. If the organization decides to use this option in their corporate storytelling, the published content must underpin the image of the brand and encourage users to interact and generate dialogue. From a data analysis perspective, this type of content is highly beneficial, since it offers the list of users who viewed it (Axel Springer España, 2017).

9. *Statistics*. Beyond the auditing of self-destructing content and the feedback that companies can access from the responses obtained in the conversations (especially when the user has the double blue check enabled), WB provides companies a statistics service that groups messages in four categories: 1) sent messages; 2) delivered messages; 3) read messages; and 4) received messages. Analysis of the data is of great value for audience reporting and for evaluating both ROI and IOR (Amado et al., 2020; Novoa et al., 2020).

10. *Operability*. Despite the fact that WhatsApp is an eminent mobile service, organizations can opt for the web version to make professional management easier. This feature is installed using a QR code that appears on the computer or tablet screen and can be scanned with a reader provided by the application downloaded to the smartphone. As well as enabling the edition and delivery of files stored on the computer, it helps avoid spelling mistakes and corrector errors. Indeed, although the conversation is held on WhatsApp, the organization must always be careful with writing

and spelling, regardless of the use of mobile language resources such as emoticons or some more informal titles, greetings or farewell formulas. No matter the medium, spelling errors and careless writing always undermine the corporate image. In the eyes of the public, it is the company's responsibility to maintain and uphold the standard of the conversation. Thus, these mistakes indicate mistrust, a lack of seriousness and lack of rigor and professionalism on the part of the organization.

11. *Account verification*. WB occassionally verifies business accounts, certifying with a green *tick* those profiles that have been verified to actually belong to the organization that created them. No company can give itself this green certification, since WhatsApp does not accept suggestions or provide a support service for these cases. Rather, it is the application team who are in charge of carrying out this verification process, gradually and automatically (WhatsApp, 2020). Therefore, the green tick provides a great reassurance to the user. However, not having this checkmark badge does not detract at all from the account or the company, as it is not up to them to obtain the certification, even less so within a specific timeframe.

Nothing prevents the organization from using cross-promotional techniques on other platforms, such as the website or blog, to promote the use of WhatsApp as a means of communication. However, the communicative relationship between brand and user must be initiated by the user, not the brand. For it to be iniated by the organization, the user should have previously provided their telephone number (for example through a contact form), and have requested information and/ or specifically consented to this type of communication. Users may perceive the organization taking the initiative as intrusive, especially when included in groups (where users can see the phone numbers of others) and in broadcast lists. In Spain, the State Agency for Data Protection decided in December 2017 that it was illegal to include people in WhatsApp groups without their consent, deeming the practice a violation of the Organic Law on Data Protection. This decision applies to public administrations and official organizations, not those who add their friends and family to groups for non-commercial purposes.

METHODOLOGY

Starting from the hypotheses that (H1) the use of WhatsApp Business is still residual and that (H2) most companies do not even offer the possibility of contacting them through regular WhatsApp, the following research objectives are proposed:

1.  To determine the extent to which WhatsApp is used by Spanish and Mexican companies.
2.  To identify which version (personal or Business) is used by companies.
3.  To examine the automation of responses and investigate the extent to which dialogue is established with the public.

The analysis sample is made up of 200 companies (100 Mexican and 100 Spanish), all of them belonging to the technology and electronic sector. The decision to select from this sector was not arbitrary, but was based on two factors: 1) the technological nature of the products that these companies were putting on the market; 2) these companies' commitment to the values and business attributes relating to innovation and technological advances. The objective is to prove that advanced use of information and communication technologies should be apparent within the technological sector. Nonetheless, the questions remains as to whether companies that sell technology really use technologies to communicate with their audiences.

In regards to Spain, the first 100 companies cataloged in the *El Economista*'s Business Ranking were selected, based on their sales figure. In Mexico, in the absence of an official ranking, the selection was made manually based on companies' turnovers (Table 1). All the data was collected in 2019, between March 20th and November 8th.

The research methodology is based on a quantitative model (Igartua, 2006), so that "between the premises and the conclusions a narrow set of regulated relationships is constituted, meaning that the transition from the first to the second ones can be accomplished by merely following the stipulations" (Del Canto & Silva, 2013, p. 28).

TABLE 1

SAMPLE DATA SHEET

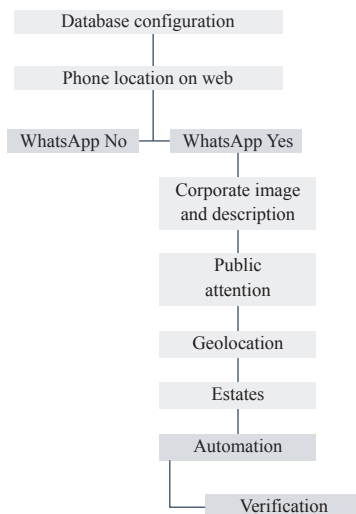| Spain | | Mexico | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Confidence interval | 95% | Confidence interval | 95% |
| Business universe | 3 363 197 | Business universe | 5 113 415 |
| Sample size | 100 | Sample size | 100 |
| Margin of error | 1.95% | Margin of error | 1.95% |

Source: The authors with data from the Spanish universe from Statista (2019) and from the Mexican universe from Statista Research Department (2020).

The research was divided into three main phases (Figure 3): database configuration, web tracking and technical analysis of WhatsApp. After assembling the list of the 200 selected companies, their websites were tracked to verify the existence of their WhatsApp numbers. In those cases in which the app was offered as a contact method, the numbers were recorded in order to analyse their public profiles according to six items that can be measured from the user's perspective:

a) Description and corporate image
b) Customer service hours
c) Geolocation
d) Self-destructing content
e) Automated responses
f) Account verification

The Mexican and Spanish technical teams were in charge of contacting the respective companies of both countries via WhatsApp to check if they responded, and if they did, whether they responded through an automated or manual system, as well as recording the response time. All inquiries were made during public service hours (hence the need for two technical teams due to time differences). The maximum time established to compute the response was one hour. The volume of data [($\pm$) 25)] meant it could be compiled on Excel. From there, the figures were converted to percentages to make them easier to read and interpret.

FIGURE 3

STAGES OF INVESTIGATION

```
            Database configuration
                     │
            Phone location on web
                     │
 WhatsApp No ──── WhatsApp Yes
                     │
               Corporate image
               and description
                     │
                  Public
                 attention
                     │
                Geolocation
                     │
                  Estates
                     │
                Automation
                     │
                 └──── Verification
```
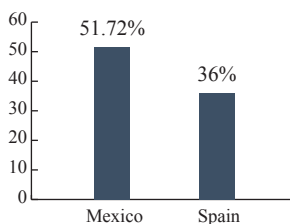
Source: The authors.

## FINDINGS

Only a quarter (27%) of Mexican and Spanish companies offer their clients the ability to contact them over WhatsApp. There are no significant differences between the two countries, although the percentage of WhatsApp implementation within Mexican businesses (29%) is higher than in Spain (25%). Of the companies that make use of a WhatsApp number, less than half (43.86%) do so using Whatsapp Business. That means that 56.14% are misusing WhatsApp by opting for the personal version of the app over the business one. In this respect, the difference between the two countries is significant (Figure 4).

Bearing in mind the benefits that organizations can reap from WB, it is verified that all companies (100%) employ three of the four indicators analyzed with excellence: description and corporate image, customer service hours and geolocation. However, none of them (0%) make

use self-destructing content. Perhaps what is most surprising is that despite using WB correctly, not all companies answer the queries sent by users. In Spain, this applies to 22.22% of the sample, and in Mexico to 27.28%. Enabling WB, yet not responding to customer concerns, is the most bizarre occurrence seen in this investigation (Figure 5).

FIGURE 4

IMPLEMENTATION OF WB IN MEXICO AND SPAIN



Source: The authors.

FIGURE 5

BUSINESS RESPONSE TO USERS
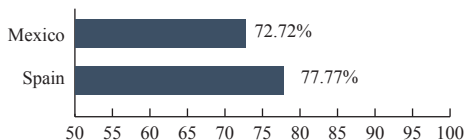


Source: Own elaboration.

Of those who respond, all do so instantly and there is a large majority (80.36%) who resort to automated responses for the first contact both in Spain (75%) and in Mexico (85.71%). Finally, only one in ten company accounts (13.63%) have been verified by WhatsApp, although in this case there is a clear difference between the two countries, since in Mexico 27.27% of the accounts are verified, while in Spain none are (0%).

| | Average | Mexico | Spain |
|---|---|---|---|
| Companies with WhatsApp | 27% | 29% | 25% |
| Companies with WhatsApp that have implemented WB | 43.86% | 51.72% | 36% |
| Utilization of the tools of WB | 75% | 75% | 75% |
|    Corporate image and description | 100% | 100% | 100% |
|    Customer service timetable | 100% | 100% | 100% |
|    Geolocation | 100% | 100% | 100% |
|    Self-destructive content | 0% | 0% | 0% |
| Answering queries | 75.24% | 72.72% | 77.77% |
| Automated responses | 80.36% | 75% | 85.71% |
| Verified business accounts | 13.63% | 27.27% | 0% |

Source: The authors.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The data obtained in the research clearly confirms the initial hypotheses. Neither Mexican nor Spanish companies are taking advantage of the communication opportunities offered by instant messaging services (H1). Additionally, the extent to which WhatsApp has been implemented as an effective communicative tool between brand and audience is lacking in both countries (H2), despite the growing number of mobile phone, applications and e-commerce consumers. In fact, 87% of Mexican and Spanish Internet users use WhatsApp, which means that it is the most used messaging service in both countries. As such, businesses' lack of empathy is exacerbated when it comes to approaching the users' daily interactive spaces –as Hoyos and Lasso de la Vega (2017) pointed out– which, counterproductively, reduces bidirectionality in communication, as well as in deterritorialized and geolocated dissemination (Sixto, 2018). Failing to make the most of the social spaces where the public participate and interact is a wasted business opportunity. Those competitor companies that are more contactable and more accessible are sure to reap the benefits (Coll, 2019; Melendo, 2011).

Although the business sector analysed here is directly linked to technology, there is a clear dichotomy between companies that are aware of the latest communication and technological innovations, and those that are less so. In the latter group, there are even those that try to be accessible, but use a version of WhatsApp that is inappropriate for corporate communication. There are two consequences of this. The first is that, personal accounts, whether in social networks or in messaging services, are never relevant for business use and their use denotes a lack of technological training. The user picks up on this, and thus this malpractice damages the brand image. The second consequence is that companies that fail to grasp these technological developments limit their own options for communication. This makes it impossible to implement the alternatives offered by the Business version of WhatsApp, those that are so relevant for organizational communication: the description and consolidation of the corporate image, the establishment of scheduled customer service, geolocation, transmedia storytelling, the automation of responses, the classification and hierarchization of information, and access to statistics. The data is more encouraging in Mexico than in Spain, however it is strongly recommended that all companies that use WhatsApp install WB.

However, the most striking finding of the research has to do with the dialogic set-up. It is surprising that companies that have their WB profile well configured with relevant information do not reply to messages sent by users, not even with automated responses to capture the return that calls to action provide. This neglect signifies a total lack of commitment to the client that is difficult to fix. It is better not to enable spaces for interaction with the public in the first place than to enable and neglect them. As a result of all the above, and in conclusion, three recommendations can be made that are applicable to all types of organizations:

a)  It is recommended that all companies offer WhatsApp, just as they have been offering a landline phone number for years, since the social behavioral habits of users have changed. Adapting to these changes is not an option, but rather an obligation to satisfy users' needs.

b) It is recommended that all companies complete their WB profiles with as much data and information as possible. The profiles in messaging applications are fast becoming as relevant as those in social networks or the web pages themselves. Designing an organized and transparent profile is also a matter of corporate image.

c) It is recommended that all companies serve their clients through WB to at least the same standard as they would face-to-face. This means that messages must always be answered. Failure to do so, aside form being rude, results in client churn.

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