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## **The sports journalists up against the communication model of football clubs in Spain: the case of Real Madrid CF in the 2011-2012 season**

*Los periodistas deportivos frente al modelo de comunicación de los clubes de fútbol en España: el caso del Real Madrid CF en la temporada 2011-2012*

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**ABSTRACT:** Football clubs are benchmark sports organisations for public opinion and society that have become official sources for the media. Communications management at the Communications departments of football clubs is crucial for sports journalists, as it determines both the quantity and the relevancy of the information produced, which is required and demanded by the media. This paper analyses the sports journalists' perception of the Real Madrid CF communication model during the 2011-2012 season and their positioning within the information ecosystem that has been developed by this organisation to keep in contact with its strategic target audience.

*RESUMEN:* Los clubes de fútbol son organizaciones deportivas de referencia para la opinión pública y la sociedad que se han convertido en fuentes oficiales de los medios de

*comunicación. La gestión de la comunicación en los departamentos de comunicación de los clubes de fútbol es crucial para los periodistas deportivos, ya que determina la cantidad y la relevancia de la información producida, que es necesaria y demandada por los medios de comunicación. En este trabajo se analiza la percepción de los periodistas deportivos del modelo de comunicación del Real Madrid CF en la temporada 2011-2012 y su posicionamiento en el ecosistema de la información que se ha desarrollado por esta organización para mantenerse en contacto con su público objetivo estratégico.*

**Keywords:** Real Madrid CF, sports journalism, communications management, strategic audience.

**Palabras clave:** Real Madrid CF, periodismo deportivo, gestión de la comunicación, público estratégico.

## 1. Introduction

Relations between sports journalists and the clubs, which are considered to be sources of information, have evolved in the same way as football has gone from being a mere competitive game to a sports show and they have various interests and diverse target audiences in common. In the 50's and the 60's relationships between sports journalists and the clubs were cordial, to such an extent that certain club scandals were hushed up so that these information sources were not spoiled<sup>1</sup>. This goodwill sought by sports journalists continues today, although it now applies to other target groups, such as the football players themselves or the sponsors, so that these information sources are not lost<sup>2</sup>. The clubs want this amiability to continue too, so that they get good media coverage<sup>3</sup>.

However, the communicative behaviour of the football clubs has changed since the beginning of the 21st century. These organisations now produce and manage the information about their clubs through their own multimedia platforms, in this way they do not have to depend on the information edited by the traditional forms of media<sup>4</sup>. As discussed hereinafter, our study was founded on this new paradigm, which has caused conflict with the traditional forms of media and the sports journalists that cover the latest news on these organisations, but criticize the clubs' communications management<sup>5</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Cfr. SUGDEN, John and TOMLINSON, Alan, "Stories from planet football and sportsworld. Source relations and collusion in sport journalism", *Journalism Practice*, 1 (1), 2007, p. 45.

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. ROWE, David, "Sports journalism. Still the 'toy department' of the news media?", *Journalism*, 8(4), 2007, pp. 390-392.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. BROOKES, Rod, *Representing Sport*, Arnold, London, 2002, p. 37.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. MORAGAS, Miquel de, KENNETT, Christopher and GINESTA, Xavier, "Football and media in Europe. A new sport paradigm for the global era", in TOMLINSON, Alan, YOUNG, Christopher and HOLT, Richard (eds.), *Sport and the Transformation of Modern Europe. States, media and markets 1950-2010*, Routledge, Oxon (Great Britain), 2011, p. 138.

<sup>5</sup> The study was carried out on the work of the author's PhD thesis, *La comunicación comunicativa de los clubes de fútbol en España con los medios de comunicación como público estratégico: análisis del modelo del F.C. Barcelona y del Real Madrid C.F. y su percepción por los periodistas deportivos* (English title- Digital communication of FC Barcelona and Real Madrid CF and its perception by sports journalists), Universidad Miguel Hernández of Elche (Spain), 2012.

As explained hereinafter, the role of the sports journalists is linked to how the clubs like Real Madrid CF are run through their Communications departments, which have evolved constantly during the last 30 years, adapting to the global dimension of the organisation and the inherent sports show concept associated with its business activities<sup>6</sup>.

## 2. Theoretical framework

There have been drastic changes in football in the last few years, so much so that this sport has become an industry. In the last few decades of the 20th century television helped turn football, which used to be just a sports discipline, into a mass spectator show. Now, in the 21st century, with the appearance of ICT platforms, mobile telephones, Internet, digital and satellite television<sup>7</sup>, football has taken on a business dimension and it is covered constantly by the news all around the world<sup>8</sup>. The Real Madrid football club is always in the limelight, not only because of its sporting success, but also because of its financial track record and its business management in the last few years, especially under the presidency of Florentino Pérez<sup>9</sup>.

The organisational structures of the football clubs have been altered so that business management models can be implemented and nowadays certain departments including that of sports, finance and economics or communications, together with other units related to the corporate image of the organisation have become more important: external relations, social affairs and marketing<sup>10</sup>. In fact, according to a study carried out on the evolution of the organisational structures of the football clubs in Spain from 1996 to 2006, that focused on the clubs taking part in the first division of the National Professional Football League (LFP by its acronym in Spanish), the department that has progressed the most within these organisations is that of Communications. Indeed, it is thought to be the area that has grown the most within these clubs, far more than that of sports and financial management<sup>11</sup>.

Cleland highlights the role of the Communications departments of football clubs which is focused on attaining four basic objectives: develop a positive image of the club and its trademark, provide supporters and the media with information, establish a bi-directional relationship with the fans by letting them take part in the club and deal with problematic situations in such a way that they affect the club's image as little as possible<sup>12</sup>.

As stated by Gómez et al., the professional football clubs in Spain have realised how important it is to associate with their surroundings from different perspectives and corporate strategies, which among others, include that of communication and external relations<sup>13</sup>. Handling relations with the media is one of the main functions of these departments. In this

<sup>6</sup> Cfr. HOPWOOD, Maria, "Public Relations and the Media", in HAMIL, Sean and CHADWICK, Simon (eds.), *Managing Football. An international perspective*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2010, pp. 55-72.

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. BOYLE, Raymond and HAYNES, Richard, *Football in the new media age*, Routledge, London, 2004.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. CLELAND, Jamie, "The Changing Organizational Structure of football clubs and their relationship with external media", *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2009, 2, pp. 417-419.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. KASE, Kimio, et al., "Real Madrid CF-FC Barcelona: Business strategy vs. sports strategy, 2000-2006", *CSBM: Center for Sport Business Management*, Occasional Paper n° 6/12-E, pp. 1-26.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. GÓMEZ, Sandalio, MARTÍ, Carlos and OPAZO, Magdalena, "The structural characteristics of sport organisations: Differentiation within elite Spanish professional football clubs", *CSBM: Center for Sport Business Management*, Working Paper 751, May, pp. 6-12.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>12</sup> CLELAND, Jamie, *op. cit.*, pp. 424-425.

<sup>13</sup> GÓMEZ, Sandalio, MARTÍ, Carlos and OPAZO, Magdalena, *op. cit.*, pp. 11-12.

sense, it is well worth mentioning a study carried out in the 2008-2009 season on the German and English football league competitions, *Bundesliga* and the Premier League respectively, that focused on the importance of the interest groups (stakeholders) in the clubs, in which the media was said to be the main interest group for these sports organisations<sup>14</sup>.

This therefore supports the work of the clubs' Communications departments, which, according to Tomlinson and Sugden basically have three functions<sup>15</sup>: a) to be in charge of the club's contacts with the media, b) to produce positive news about the company and c) to be aware of journalists that criticise the way that the club is run. According to the aforementioned authors, the work of this department really makes that of the sports journalists much easier, as it provides them with all kinds of data in an extremely simple way through different communication tools.

Furthermore, from the very beginning, according to Lewis and Kitchin, the traditional role of the Communications departments in sports organisations has been to keep in constant contact with the media and get good coverage, especially in the newspapers and on the television<sup>16</sup>.

This is how Almeida (2008) sees it too. In his study on the Portuguese football clubs<sup>17</sup>, he insists that the predominating communications model is based on the clubs' relationships with the media, which is thought to be the best way to get the club's institutional, corporate and marketing messages across to their supporters and to the general public, especially when the main figures of the news or the institutional events of the club are the players or the coaches. Just like in Portugal, the professionals at the communication departments at the press offices of the English football clubs state that although they have their own communications platforms, the relationships with the journalists are still one of their main priorities<sup>18</sup>.

However, the football clubs have changed their communications management model, especially in terms of their relationship with the media. Favoured by the implementation of the ICT, the clubs' Communications departments are like the gatekeepers that control and disseminate information that they produce themselves through their own means of communication, such as televisions, their own radio stations and online media<sup>19</sup>. This is how they can control the messages which are passed on directly to their target audiences without the conventional media having to intervene<sup>20</sup>. In turn, the revenue made from the sports television broadcasting rights in the football clubs has led to changes being made to the corresponding organisation and the communication structure of the clubs that stress the need for communication to be run directly by their own Communication departments<sup>21</sup>. In one study on the English clubs, Boyle points out that the clubs use their own communication

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. KREMER, Jan, WALZEL, Stefan and HOVEMANN, Gregor, "CSR Performance Scorecard. Measuring effects of Corporate Social Responsibility in professional football", *7th German Conference for Sport Economics and Sport Management*, Colonia, 2010.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. TOMLINSON, Alan and SUGDEN, John, "Sport journalism: persistent themes and changing times", in FRANKLIN, Bob (ed.), *Pulling newspapers apart: analysing print journalism*, Routledge, New York, 2008, p. 149.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. LEWIS, Rob and KITCHIN, Paul, "New Communications Media for Sport", in HOPWOOD, Maria, KITCHIN, Paul and SKINNER, James (eds.), *Sport Public Relations and Communications*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Oxford, 2010, p. 188.

<sup>17</sup> Cfr. ALMEIDA, João Pedro Campos Moreira de, "A comunicação no futebol de massas. Reflexão sobre a importância estratégica da relação com os media para um clube de massas. Estudo de caso. Futebol Clube do Porto", Universidade do Minho, Braga, Portugal, 2008.

<sup>18</sup> CLELAND, Jamie, *op. cit.*, p. 427.

<sup>19</sup> Cfr. GINESTA, Xavier, "Los medios propios de los clubes de fútbol españoles. De la revista oficial a los canales de TDT", *Estudios sobre el mensaje periodístico*, 2010, 16, pp. 145-166.

<sup>20</sup> Cfr. MORAGAS, Miquel de, KENNET, Christopher and GINESTA, Xavier, *op. cit.*, p. 138.

<sup>21</sup> CLELAND, Jamie, *op. cit.*, p. 418.

channels to stop the mass media intervening and by doing so, with the help of the ICT tools and related channels, they can now directly inform their target audience about the latest news<sup>22</sup>.

In addition to this, the relationships between the sports organisations, the media and the target audiences of these sports have also changed with the appearance of the Web 2.0 and the corresponding social platforms; the audience, that includes the members, fans, supporters and other target groups of the sports organisations not only interact, but they are also like content generators that are related to these organisations<sup>23</sup>: the traditional forms of media still have an important role in the modern-day communications model used by the sports organisations. Admittedly there is more to the traditional role of the Communications departments than just being a source of information, although their relationship with the media, which is one of the target audiences—not only of the Communications department itself—but of the whole organisation—is one of the main priorities of this department, but from a more extensive and far-reaching point of view. According to Hopwood<sup>24</sup>, the media is a necessary audience for the Communications department of the football clubs because it provides them with another way to directly get in touch with the consumers of their products.

In the light of these changes made to the clubs' communication model, the social networks have turned out to be a strategic tool that keeps them in contact with their supporters, to whom they supply all kinds of information, especially exclusives<sup>25</sup> and they keep them up-to-date on what is going on in the club, mainly through the personal opinions of the players<sup>26</sup>.

One example of this is the study carried out by Coombs<sup>27</sup>, which proved that the international sports organisations, such as the English *Premier League* among others, use the social media in their communications strategies to basically provide information to the media and the supporters of the competitions.

As for Spain, the study titled *Fútbol 2.0*, which analyzes how football clubs are incorporating 2.0 technologies into their communication strategies and their football teams, event promotions etc. that was carried out by the consultancy firm dosdoce.com<sup>28</sup>, highlights the excessive corporatist content of the information that the clubs include in the different media of the Web 2.0, as the majority of what is published in the social networks comes from the organisations corporate Website. Furthermore, it points out that these sports organisations hardly use the social media networks to interact with their supporters, unlike the numerous footballers, who do use this type of social media. Not only does Twitter enable the players to take part in the information production processes, but it also lets them interact with the fans

<sup>22</sup> Cfr. BOYLE, Raymond, *Sports journalism and communication: challenges and opportunities in the digital media age*. Asia Communication and Media Forum, 14-16, Sept 2007, Beijing, China, p. 14.

<sup>23</sup> Cfr. SCHULTZ, Brad, CASKEY, Philip and ESHERICK, Craig, *Media Relations in Sport*, Fitness Information Technology, West Virginia, 2010.

<sup>24</sup> HOPWOOD, Maria, *op. cit.*, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. KASSING, Jeffrey and SANDERSON, James, "Fan-athlete interaction and Twitter tweeting through the giro: a case study", *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2010, 3 (1), pp. 113-128.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. WILLIAMS, Jo and CHIN, Susan, "Meeting Relationship-Marketing Goals Through Social Media: A Conceptual Model for Sport Marketers", *International Journal of Sport Communication*, 2010, 3 (4), p. 430.

<sup>27</sup> Cfr. COOMBS, Allison, "The impact of social media on sports public relations", A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Science in Information Design and Corporate Communication, Bentley University, 2009, p. 36.

<sup>28</sup> Cfr. dosdoce.com (2011): Fútbol 2.0. Análisis comparativo de la estrategia de comunicación digital de varios equipos de fútbol y jugadores en la Web 2.0, consulted on the 3rd of January, 2012 in the url: <http://www.dosdoce.com/articulo/estudios/3653/futbol-2-0/>

without the being screened by the Communications department of the sports organisations, or by the media<sup>29</sup>.

As a corollary of this, the change in the communications model of the football clubs has been favoured by the incorporation of the ICT in their communications strategy and this has led to the harmonious coexistence of the offline and online communication models<sup>30</sup>. The sports organisation has gone from being a source to an editor of the news that it produces, which is why the role of the media has dwindled. The launching of new forms of media (corporate Websites, television channels, twitter, blogs or radio stations), as well as the traditional print media, which was the traditional means of keeping the clubs in contact with the fans, has produced a new information ecosystem concerning the latest news about these sports organisations; it is an information space that is no longer dominated by traditional forms of media that have lost their hegemony because the origins of broadcasting have changed<sup>31</sup>.

### 3. Methodology and hypothesis

When designing the methodology for our study, the work of Cleland<sup>32</sup> was followed; he analysed the relationships that four English football clubs from the Premier League had with the media. This author based his study on a double quantitative and qualitative methodology: through semi-structured interviews with club managers and journalists, together with questionnaires for the supporters of these clubs.

Therefore a quantitative and qualitative methodology was chosen for this study. In-depth interviews were held with professionals who have worked in the Communications department of Real Madrid CF during the last 12 years<sup>33</sup>. A hemerographic review was also carried out to determine the role of the club's Communications department in the years before Florentino Pérez became President<sup>34</sup>. As for hemerographic sources, online archives of Spanish newspapers, magazines and other periodicals such as the El País, ABC, Mundo Deportivo and La Vanguardia were used, because by directly accessing these documents, which in many cases are in PDF format; the research work involved is much quicker.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. SANDERSON, James and KASSING, Jeffrey, "Tweets and blogs. Transformative, adversarial, and integrative developments in sports media", in BILLINGS, Andrew C. (ed.), *Sports Media. Transformation, Integration, Consumption*, Routledge, New York, 2011, p. 114.

<sup>30</sup> CLELAND, Jamie, *op. cit.*, p. 417.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. PRUDKIN, Gonzalo, Blogosfera, Mídiaesfera y Fútbol: aspectos del funcionamiento de un nuevo ecosistema informativo en la Argentina. *PRISMA.COM*, 9, 2010, pp. 7-9.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. CLELAND, Jamie, *op. cit.*, pp. 425-428.

<sup>33</sup> Interviews were organised between May 2011 and February 2012, with Joaquín Maroto, Director of Communications of the club during the first stage of the Florentino Pérez presidency of Real Madrid; David Jiménez, head of Corporate Communications during the presidency of Ramón and Pedro Duarte, head of the New Media Department between 2007 and 2012. The club's current Director of Communications, Antonio Galeano, refused to be interviewed, saying that Real Madrid CF is not in favour of disclosing the ins and outs of its communications policy and sent us the club's annual reports instead. To this end, the reports on the seasons 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 were studied, as they were the most up-to-date publications available when this study was being carried out.

<sup>34</sup> Florentino Pérez, became president of the Real Madrid CF in July, 2000. He has promoted the media side of Real Madrid CF from a global point of view (Cfr. PASAMONTES, Juan Carlos, *Todos los jefes de la casa blanca: de Julián Palacios a Florentino Pérez*, Alhambra, Madrid, 2003), he turned a traditional football club into a modern media-sports organisation (Cfr. BLANCO CALLEJO, Miguel and FORCADELL, Francisco Javier, "Real Madrid Football Club: a new model of business organisation for sports clubs in Spain", *Global Business and Organisational Excellence*, November-December, pp.51-64).

Structured questionnaires with open questions for sports journalists who cover the news on Real Madrid CF together with structured questionnaires with closed questions were used as well. These questionnaires were sent to 44 sports journalists that usually cover the news on Real Madrid CF. The selection sample criteria was based on reporters that focus on the daily news about the club, who have a special kind of relationship with the sources and with the different figures from the organisation, apart from the editor-in-chief, heads of section, columnists and other positions that deal with the latest news about these clubs and other disciplines or organisations. The exception in this case is the specialised newspapers that are in constant touch with the organisation (AS and Marca), which is why the questionnaires were given to those in charge of the specific Real Madrid sections from aforesaid newspapers. It is therefore a small population, made up of specialized and general-interest media from Madrid. To choose the different forms of media in Madrid, the Communications Guide of the Community of Madrid was used as a source and the following were chosen:

\* **Radio stations:** Cadena SER, Cadena COPE, Onda Cero, Radio MARCA, RNE and Punto Radio.

\* **Print media (specialized and general-interest):** AS, Marca, El Mundo, El País, ABC, La Razón and Público.

\* **General Information Agencies:** EFE and Europa Press.

\* **Television channels:** TVE, Cuatro, Tele5, Telemadrid, La Sexta, Antena 3 and Canal Plus.

A pre-test was carried out with journalists from different forms of media (television, newspapers, radio and general information agencies) to try and correct any possible mistakes in the questions written, detect any difficulties in understanding the questions, and to determine the suitability and the usefulness of the variables chosen for the research work.

The two semi-structured questionnaires were designed, self-administered by means of accessing a specific Website connected to the link that was sent by email to the chosen journalists. The first questionnaire with closed questions contained 36 variables with three types of answers: a) dichotomous, b) multiple choice and c) multiple responses. The second contained 11 open questions used to identify any nuances in the opinions about the communications management of the clubs under analysis.

In January 2012, the questionnaires were sent to 44 journalists that write about Real Madrid CF in the different news media. Throughout that month and up until the beginning of February, different reminders were sent out or emailed and the research work was completed in April, 2012. The survey response rate was 43%. 53% of the interviewees that answered the questionnaires work in print media, 21% in radio, 47% in television and 10% in digital media. Nevertheless, two out of every ten journalists interviewed have to combine their work in different forms of media. The response percentages obtained were anywhere from between ten and twenty percent higher than those recorded in similar studies in which the journalists were interviewed as the target audience<sup>35</sup>. In the international sphere of activity, research work that included interviews with sports journalists obtained response rates of between 13%<sup>36</sup> and 21%<sup>37</sup>.

Having obtained the data, the results of both questionnaires were then analysed through a descriptive statistical study. In the questionnaire with closed questions, a univariate analysis with ordinal categorical variables was used that took into account the relative frequencies

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. CANEL, María José, and SÁNCHEZ ARANDA, José Javier, "La influencia de las actitudes profesionales del periodista español en las noticias", *Anàlisi: Quaderns de comunicació i cultura*, 23, 1999, pp. 151-170.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. WIGLEY, Shelley and MEIRICK, Patrick, "Interactive Media and Sports Journalists. The Impact of Interactive Media on Sports Journalists", *Journal of Sports Media*, 3 (1), 2008, pp. 1-25.

<sup>37</sup> Cfr. SCHULTZ, Brad and SHEFFER, Mary, "An exploratory study of how Twitter is affecting sports journalism", *Journal of Sport Communication*, 3 (2), 2010, pp. 226-239.

expressed in percentages. The aim was to describe the general behaviour of the interviewees for each of the aspects included in the questionnaire. Graphically, the data was shown by means of two graphic process models: bar charts and pie charts. Finally a response style statistical parameter was used. This criterion helps us answer the partial non-responses when some of the interviewees stopped answering the questions. In this case, we decided to make some corrections by assigning these non-responses to other strata by means of the statistical measurement of central tendency, namely the response style, which was the most common value of all the interviewees who answered the questions<sup>38</sup>, as they belong to the same analysis group, that of sports journalists.

The discourse analysis technique was used to interpret the results of the questionnaire with open answers. Hopefully the sports journalists' opinions about the communicative behaviour of the clubs can be classified with this technique, given that from an active concept of the language, discourse not only conveys ideas but it also helps to understand social reality through actions<sup>39</sup>.

Our study involved analysing a phenomenon of regular interaction between two opposing groups, the Communications departments of the football clubs and the sports journalists that write about them, although from the point of view of one of the two main figures. Accordingly, the opinions of the interviewees focus on the context of the professional ties between the two figures and the relations between them since the sports news and the clubs' communications management started to be institutionalized 30 years ago through the Communications departments.

In the textual analysis, the content of the responses and other variables were focused on: the club that they write about, their relationship with the main figures in the news (especially the players, coaches and the managers of the clubs under analysis), the type of news media they work in and how the relationships between the media and the sports organisations have evolved. The basic textual units (words) and the repeated segments (longer lexical units in a sequence of words that appear more than once in the text corpus) were also taken into account, so that the context of the relationships between the sports journalists and the football clubs could be analysed.

In view of our objective, three conceptual categories were determined, which were then ordered into eleven formulated questions. The central themes were:

- a) The level of communication between the club and the media.
- b) The relationships between the main figures of the sports news (players, coach and president) and the journalists.
- c) Communication model evaluation of the clubs' relationship with the journalists.

Having analysed the responses, the different discursive categories and the grammatical resources were determined in each question; this enabled us to interpret and explain the phenomena of the relationship between the journalists and the communications management professionals of Real Madrid CF using the statements of the interviewees.

A double hypothesis was established that was based on these assumptions. Firstly, Real Madrid CF has developed a whole new communications management model in which the traditional forms of media no longer play the main role in communication strategies of this organisation. Secondly, the implementation of this new model has altered the relationship

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. GRANDE, Ildefonso and ABASCAL, Elena, *Análisis de encuestas*, Esic, Madrid, 2005, p. 86.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. AUSTIN, John, *Cómo hacer cosas con las palabras*, Paidós, Barcelona, 1982.



between the departments of Communication and the sports journalists that normally cover the news on the club, as it limits the direct access to the traditional sources of sports information, the players and the coaches of the teams. That being the case, the sports journalists do think that this new model has helped to increase the club's control over the message being transmitted.

### 3. *Evolution of the Real Madrid CF communication model*

Real Madrid went from the model that was introduced during the presidency of Santiago Bernabéu (1943-1978), who had a real vocation for his work, promoting it from a social and sports point of view,<sup>40</sup> with a paternalistic type of control over the whole organisation, to the more professionalized type of management of Florentino Pérez, that he adopted in his first stage of leading the club in July 2000<sup>41</sup>, right up to the moment when the research work for the paper was carried out in the 2011-2012 season.

#### 3.1. *The beginnings of the communications model of Real Madrid CF: 1975-2000*

Various aspects distinguished the communications management of Real Madrid CF from the end of the 80's up until the beginning of the 21st century. The organisation put all its efforts into coordinating relations with the media and the journalists who covered the latest institutional and sports news about the club. Initially an attempt was made to export the communications management model from Public Relations, with business professionals, but soon the journalists' needs, based on constant media coverage, clashed with this approach. The club's communicative behaviour that was based on coming up with as many facilities as possible to favour the journalists' work, did not manage to sort out the relationships between the journalists and the players: after the training sessions, each reporter would approach their source in accordance with their interests<sup>42</sup>.

Under the presidency of Ramón Mendoza and Lorenzo Sanz, the first steps were taken to professionalize this department; different professionals from the world of Public Relations and from the media<sup>43</sup> were hired. The objective was to set up a press office that would act as the intermediary among the different figures involved in the information process: players, coaches and managers with the journalists.

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<sup>40</sup> Cfr. GONZÁLEZ CALLEJA, Eduardo, "Deporte y poder: El caso del Real Madrid C. de F.", *Memoria y civilización*, 7, 2004, pp.79-127.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. KASE, Kimio, *et al.*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-26.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. ALONSO, Sol, "Sólo he ido al centro de la ciudad un par de veces", Interview with Michael Laudrup, in *El País*, 17-10-1994.

<sup>43</sup> Enrique Martín, the journalist from the Spanish radio station la SER, was hired. He had worked as a sports journalist on the radio for years. Martín was head of the Communications department for a decade, under Mendoza and Lorenzo Sanz, who was president (1995-2000); he resigned in 2000 (Cfr. SANTOS, J. J., *Abrazos y zancadillas*, Aguilar, Madrid, 2009, p. 26).

### 3.2. Professionalization of communications at Real Madrid CF: 2000-2009

Florentino Pérez, who took over as president of Real Madrid CF in July 2000<sup>44</sup>, has promoted the media dimension of Real Madrid CF from a global perspective<sup>45</sup>. According to Blanco and Forcadell, his business management model has transformed “a traditional football club and turned it into a modern sports-media organisation”<sup>46</sup>.

In his strategic approach to build an international trademark, the Real Madrid of Florentino Pérez was based on the idea of restoring the dreams of the club’s supporters and recovering the legend of a club that has the best players in the world, just like during the golden era when the club won five European Cups in the 50’s<sup>47</sup>. In turn, he tried to make the most out of the contracts signed to promote the sport and the business. This is why the exploitation of media and commercial rights of the team was advocated through the club’s own marketing campaigns, by increasing media coverage, controlling the content of its communication channels and boosting the TV audience ratings<sup>48</sup>.

Although the club’s communications strategy was based on comprehensive management under Florentino Pérez, relations with the media were still essential for the club managers. According to Joaquín Maroto (2011)<sup>49</sup>, the first director of communications of the club<sup>50</sup>, this stage was characterised by cordiality and the department’s determination to put the spotlight on the club’s stars such as Figo, Raúl, Zidane, Ronaldo and Beckham, who were much more than sportsmen, they became reference points for society. Those at the Communications department realised that the best way to position the Real Madrid trademark was to come up with a media strategy based on giving the sports journalists access to these players, which is why a policy that would favour the media being in constant touch with them was established.

The work of Joaquín Maroto was continued on by his successor, Antonio García Ferreras, who had been the general manager of the Spanish radio channel Cadena SER, before taking over as director of the Department of Information and Communications of Real Madrid in September 2004, even though he had been the number one candidate for this post when Florentino Pérez took over as president. As Director of Information and Communications, García Ferreras was in charge of the strategic relations with the media and he promoted the club’s own television channel, Real Madrid TV and all the organisation’s multimedia systems including the corporate Website available in different languages, the e-Newsletters and the platforms on mobile devices intended for the followers of the Madrid football club<sup>51</sup>.

<sup>44</sup> He went up against Lorenzo Sanz in the elections, having brought them forward believing that the sporting success of Real Madrid, with two Champions League trophies, one Intercontinental cup and another League trophy would work in his favour.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. PASAMONTES, Juan Carlos, *op. cit.*, pp. 410-415.

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. BLANCO CALLEJO, Miguel and FORCADELL, Francisco Javier, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-64.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. CARLIN, John, *Los ángeles blancos. El Real Madrid y el nuevo fútbol*, Seix Barral, Barcelona, 2004.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. URRUTIA DE HOYOS, Ignacio, KASE, Kimio, and others, “El mapa estratégico del Real Madrid: el arte de construir una marca”, *Estrategia Financiera*, 231, 2006, pp. 10-18.

<sup>49</sup> Personal interview, held in Madrid on the 15th of May, 2011.

<sup>50</sup> Joaquín Maroto took over the Communications department in September, 2000. After two years, he was reprimanded for not knowing how to handle the relations between the players and the journalists who were authorised to cover the daily news of the white club.

<sup>51</sup> During this period, the Communications department also redesigned the publications of the club and embarked upon the first ever film about the organisation, consulted on the 14th of January, 2012 in the url:[http://www.realmadrid.com/cs/Satellite/es/1202733119484/noticia/Noticia/Antonio\\_Garcia\\_Ferreras.htm](http://www.realmadrid.com/cs/Satellite/es/1202733119484/noticia/Noticia/Antonio_Garcia_Ferreras.htm)

The strategy of García Ferreras was based on restoring relations with the media that the organisation had nurtured in the past with its members. The objective was to get the media to consolidate itself as a reference point on the latest news about the club<sup>52</sup>.

This communications approach was followed during the presidency of Ramón Calderón from 2006 onwards. All the different areas concerning the club's public image were coordinated by the management at the communications department; it was independent and it did not have to answer to the marketing and business departments, as it had its own communications channels and planned objectives. However, according to David Jiménez, Calderón's Corporate Communications Manager<sup>53</sup>, the Communications department was conditioned by sports and institutional current affairs that had to be administered every day, at all times, given the media's constant demand for information and this led to disagreements between different figures involved in the communications process.

### 3.3. *The global communication of Real Madrid CF: 2010-2012*

The heads of the Communications department of Real Madrid CF now write annual reports on the organisation to justify their communications model. According to its Communications director, Antonio Galeano<sup>54</sup>, Real Madrid CF does not like to disclose anything about its communications policy other than what is included in the aforesaid documents. Therefore, the annual reports on the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 seasons, from when Florentino Pérez<sup>55</sup> became president, have been studied and used to identify the target audiences of the Communications department and the activities that are organised in all the institutional areas. In these corporate reports the club gives a declaration of intent concerning its communicative behaviour and its relationship with the media, although it does advocate the use of its own media to control the image and the standing the club.

In the 2009-2010 season the club's Communications department agreed to have 2000 interviews and 350 press conferences; the selection of the first team squad was also announced through the organisation's own audiovisual media channels. As stated in the report, these initiatives were part of the club's commitment to "making the work of the many professionals who cover the news of Real Madrid each season, easier." The main priorities of this department included the incorporation of a simultaneous translation system in various languages in the press conferences, the renewal of the line-up sheets in the matches played in Santiago Bernabéu, the installation of a Wi-Fi network in the Press Room and the updating of the design and corporate image of the interview rooms.

In turn, the club's department of Communication created a special Press File for the days when Real Madrid CF plays home games, Champions League Guides and a basketball section to favour the work of the reporters that normally cover the latest news about the club.

During the 2010-2011 season a WI-FI network was set up for the media in the press area at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium and in the teams training facilities at *Ciudad Real Madrid*

<sup>52</sup> Cfr. TORRES, Diego, interview with Antonio García Ferreras, new director of Communications of Real Madrid: "Hay que ofrecer el Madrid a todo el planeta", in *El País*, 7-10-2004.

<sup>53</sup> Personal interview held in February, 2012.

<sup>54</sup> Antonio Galeano, formerly worked for the Spanish television channel La Sexta, as the Sports Director under the ex-director of Communications of Real Madrid, Antonio García Ferreras, who was appointed as DIRCOM-Director of Communications of the club in June, 2009.

<sup>55</sup> This document can be consulted at url: [http://www.realmadrid.com/StaticFiles/RealMadrid/img/pdf/InformeRm09\\_10.pdf](http://www.realmadrid.com/StaticFiles/RealMadrid/img/pdf/InformeRm09_10.pdf)

(Real Madrid City). This meant that more authorised professionals were able to cover the different official competitions that the team takes part in: an average of 250 journalists in the competitive matches in Spain and 400 in the Champions League.

The number of interviews organised by the Communications department increases every year: in the 2010-2011 season, 262 interviews were held with players from the first-team squad and 98 with the technical staff (the head coach, José Mourinho, and the assistant coach, Aitor Karanka). Out of the 190 press conferences held with the team, 126 were with the technical team and 64 were with the players in the areas run by the club's Communications department: press room, press box in the stand and the mixed area at the Santiago Bernabéu stadium and the press room and the interview sets in the first-team squad area at the club's *Ciudad Deportiva*. Moreover, this department is also in charge of Communication at the different offices in the Alfredo Di Stéfano stadium, which is where the reserve team plays and in the Caja Mágica (The Magic Box Stadium) where the Real Madrid basketball team plays.

The analysis of the club's organisation chart in the 2011-2012 season shows that this department had more bearing when the director of Communications joined the club's management team<sup>56</sup>. Nevertheless, according to the sports journalists that follow the news on the team, the director of Communications and the Communications department were subordinate to the strategy and the decisions of Mourinho, as he formulated the institutional messages on certain occasions<sup>57</sup> and decided when the players and coaches had to see the media. The Portuguese coach stopped the press conferences and prevented the players from making statements to the media unless it was supervised by him and this created friction between the coach and the football players<sup>58</sup>.

This tense situation with the Portuguese coach was re-enacted in April 2011, when the majority of the authorised journalists walked out of the Real Madrid press room after realising that Mourinho had gone to the press conference before the match against FC Barcelona, but delegated the official statements to the assistant coach, Aitor Karanka<sup>59</sup>.

#### *4. The sports journalists' perception of the communication management of Real Madrid CF: quantitative and qualitative analysis*

The analysis of the results of the interviews carried out with the sports journalists that cover the news on Real Madrid CF are included in this section.

<sup>56</sup> This can be consulted in the club's Website, through the following link: <http://www.realmadrid.com/cs/Satellite/es/2500002544549/2500002544640/OrganigramaClub/Club.htm>

<sup>57</sup> After the away game of the Champions League semi-finals between Real Madrid and FC Barcelona, Mourinho complained about the refereeing and got the players and managers of the club to do the same; cfr. TORRES, Diego, "Todo persuasión", in *El País*, 29-04-2011.

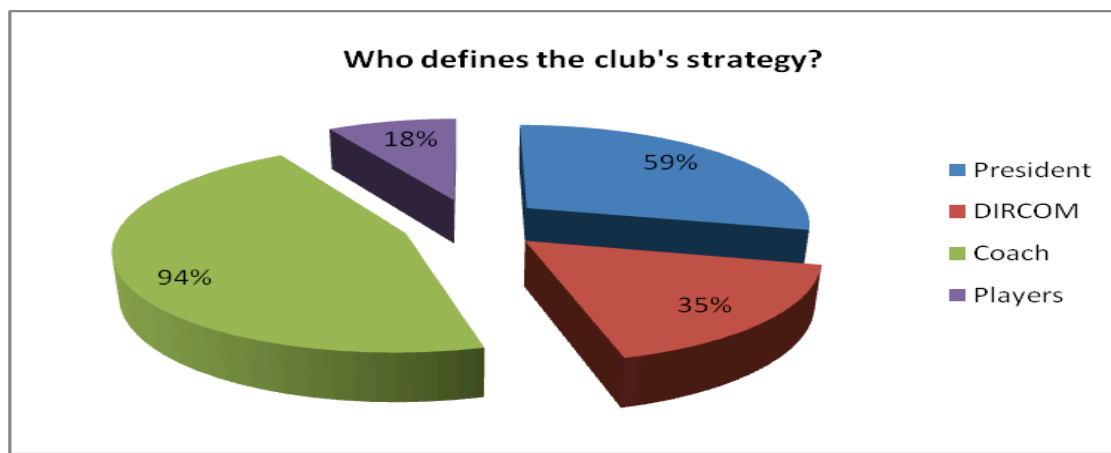
<sup>58</sup> This happened in January 2012, in the middle of the 2011-2012 season and it was published exclusively in the newspaper *Marca*; cfr. "Máxima tensión en el vestuario madridista", *Marca*, 22nd of January, 2012, consulted on the 22nd of January, 2012 in the url: [http://www.marca.com/2012/01/22/futbol/equipos/real\\_madrid/1327231392.html](http://www.marca.com/2012/01/22/futbol/equipos/real_madrid/1327231392.html)

<sup>59</sup> Cfr. RTVE (2011): "La prensa española se planta ante la decisión de Mourinho de no hablar antes del 'clásico'". 15th of April 2011; recovered on the 17th of April, 2012, in <http://www.rtve.es/deportes/20110415/prensa-espanola-se-planta-ante-decision-mourinho-no-hablar-antes-del-clasico/424889.shtml>

#### 4.1.1. *Definition of the Real Madrid CF Communication Strategy*

94% of the journalists interviewed, think that the coach determines the communication policies of the clubs. This fact should be put into perspective, seeing as the journalists interviewed had all the main figures to choose from, which is why some of the reporters think that the responsibilities of communications management could be shared among various individuals. Moreover, 59% of the journalists think that as Florentino Pérez is president of the organisation, he is also in charge of the communications strategy. This point highlights the lack of influence that the club's director of Communications has when it comes to defining the Real Madrid CF communication policy.

**Figure 1. Main figures involved in the Real Madrid CF communications strategy**

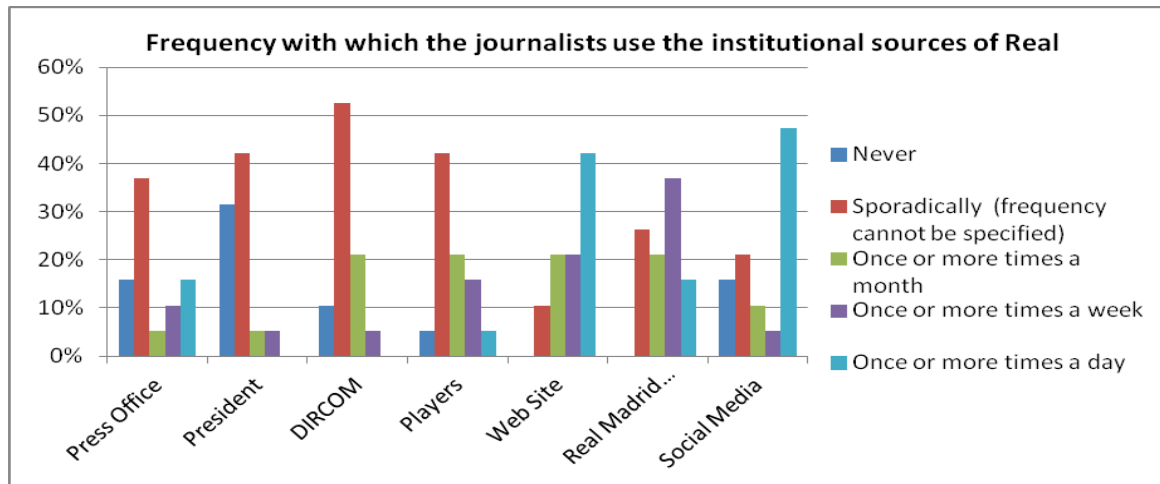


Compiled by the author.

#### 4.1.2. *Institutional sources of Real Madrid used by the journalists*

The main institutional sources used daily by the journalists are the club's social networks (47%) and the corporate Website (42%). Another medium used by the journalists as an institutional source, although on a weekly basis, is Real Madrid TV (37%). Oddly, the press office, which by nature is the department that should be most concerned about the needs of the media, is only used by 16% of the journalists on a daily basis. Moreover, the organisation's director of Communications has hardly any regular contact with the journalists who follow the latest news of the club and 56% of them only see him sporadically. Similarly, 46% of the journalists cannot specify the frequency with which they approach either the president of the club or the players for information saying that it just depends on what is in the news at any given time.

**Figure 2. Frequency with which the journalists use the institutional sources of Real Madrid CF**

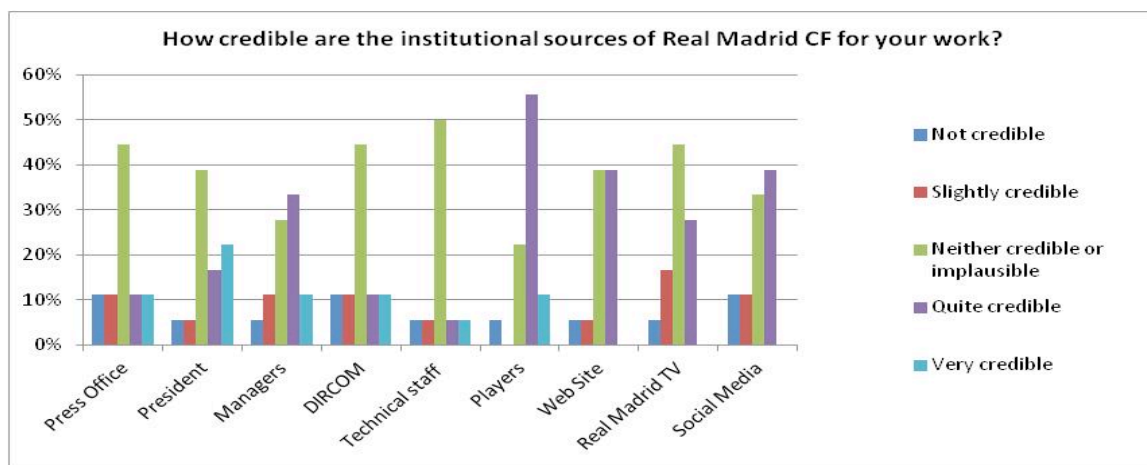


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#### 4.1.3. Credibility of the institutional sources of Real Madrid

67% of the reporters in Madrid consider the players to be a credible source, 44% trust the managers and 43% believe in what the president says. Neither the managers nor the president of the club are thought to be as important as news sources, given the organisational structure of the club. Other institutional sources do not seem to be as reliable for the journalists either: 40% trust the club’s official social networks, another 40% trust the corporate Website, 22% believe the press office is a plausible source and only 11% think that the technical staff of the first-team squad is a trustworthy source of information. All in all, it is worthwhile pointing out that as interviews are no longer permitted the coach has established a media relations protocol, through press conferences.

**Figure 3. Credibility of the institutional sources of Real Madrid CF according to the journalists**

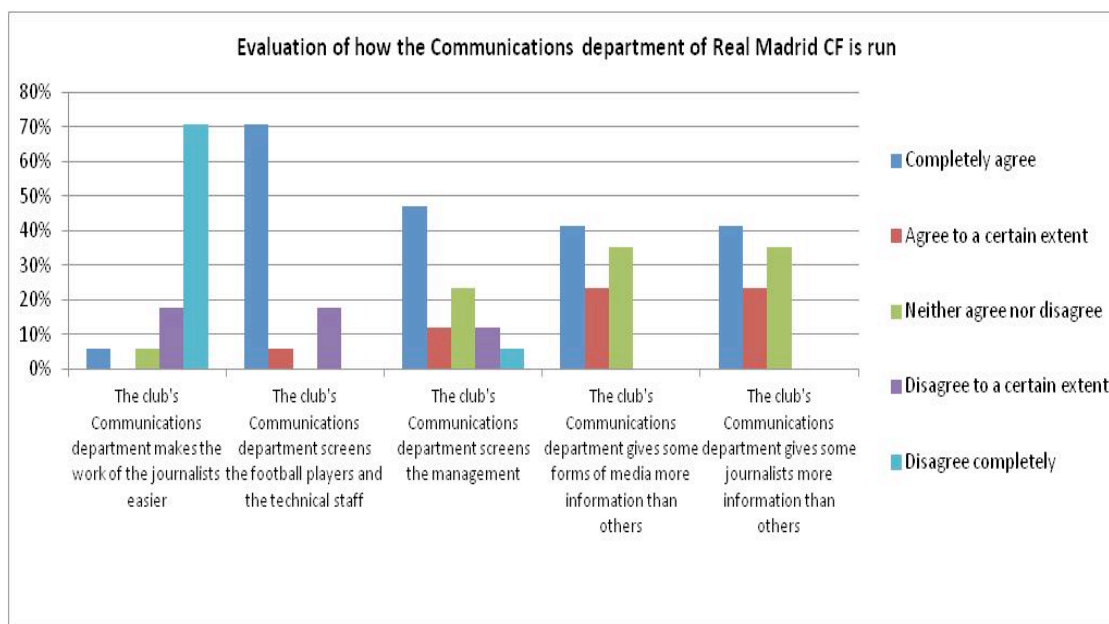


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#### 4.1.4. Opinions on the communications model of Real Madrid

In terms of the evaluation of the role of the Communications department, 89% of the sports journalists think that it doesn't make their job any easier. For 77%, the department screens the contact between the journalists, players and coaches, 59% think that the relationships between the reporters and the managers of the club are also screened. According to 65% of those interviewed, the club favours certain types of media over others; 65% think that this policy of favouritism applies to certain sports journalists too.

**Figure 4. Evaluation of how the Communications department of Real Madrid CF is run**



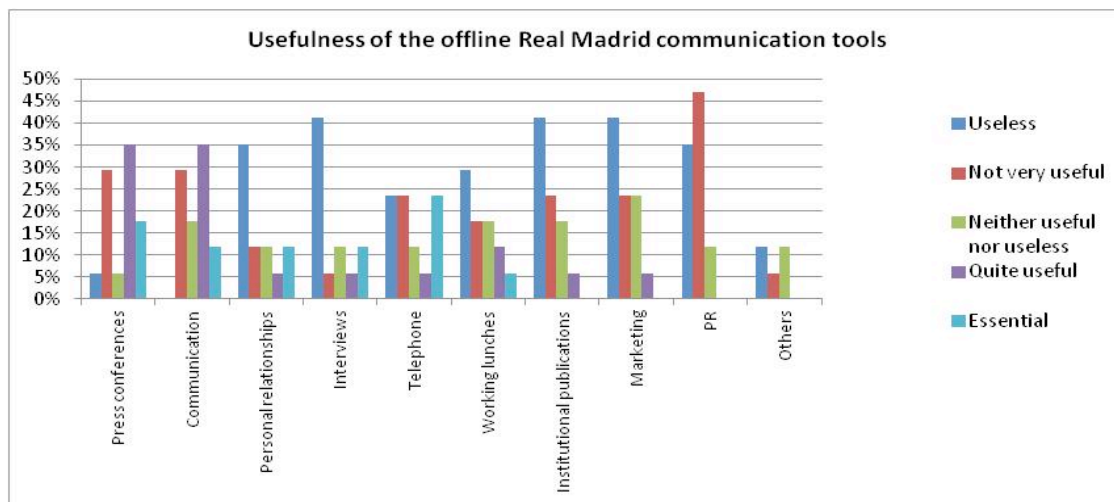
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#### 4.1.5. Usefulness of the offline Real Madrid communication tools

The results show that only two of the communication tools meet the expectations of the journalists and a significant percentage of them evaluate the tools negatively: the press conferences are essential or at least quite useful for 53% of the journalists, although 35% think that they do not contribute very much, if at all to their work; the press releases are useful for 47% of the interviewees, while 29% think that they are not very useful, if at all.

The majority of tools and communication activities of the club are not perceived as being very useful, if at all, for the journalists' work: the Public Relations events for 82%; marketing schemes, for 65%; the institutional publications, for 65%; phone contacts, for 62%; working lunches with sources from the club for 47%; personal relationships with sources from the club for 47%; and the interviews with sources from the club for 46% of the reporters.

**Figure 5. Usefulness of the offline Real Madrid communication tools**



Compiled by the author.

#### 4.1.6. Usefulness of the online Real Madrid communication tools

There is a difference of opinion among the journalists in terms of the value of the online tools and communication channels that the club uses to fill them in on the latest news. The most important channel of them all is the mobile telephone used by the Communications department to get in touch with reporters: 36% of the interviewees think that the mobile phone is absolutely essential or quite useful for their work, whilst another 36% think that it is not very useful, if at all.

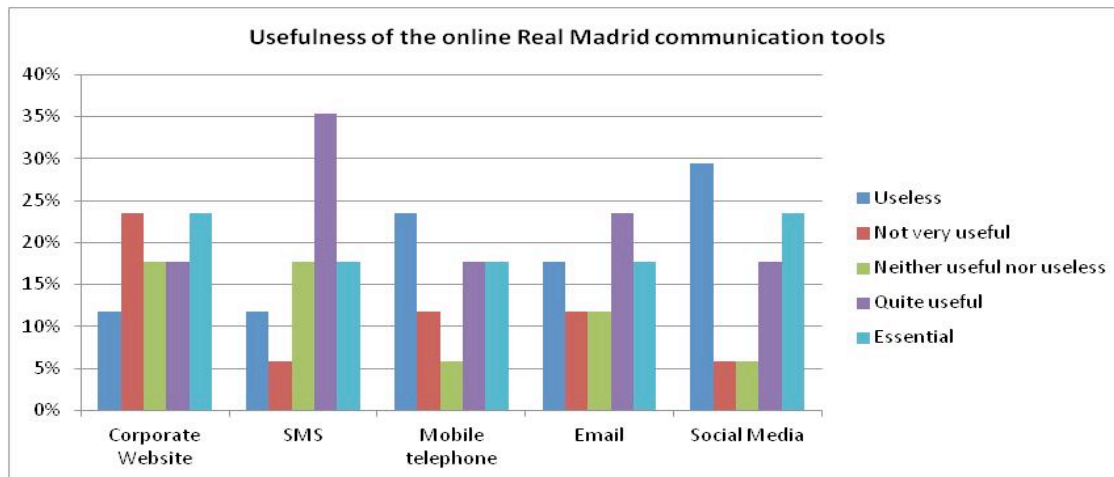
As for the emails used by the department as a communication tool to contact the journalists, 42% think that they are indispensable or quite useful, 30% think the opposite. Only 53% of journalists think that the SMS messages sent by the department are vital or quite useful and 18% that think they are not very useful, if at all, for their work.

In relation to the usefulness of the information edited by the Communications department in the club's official social networks, 42% think this is essential or quite useful for their work and 35% think that it is not very helpful, if at all.

Regarding the content of the corporate Website, 42% think that it is valuable or quite useful for their work, whereas 36% of the journalists state the opposite.



**Figure 6. Usefulness of the online Real Madrid communication tools**



Compiled by the author.

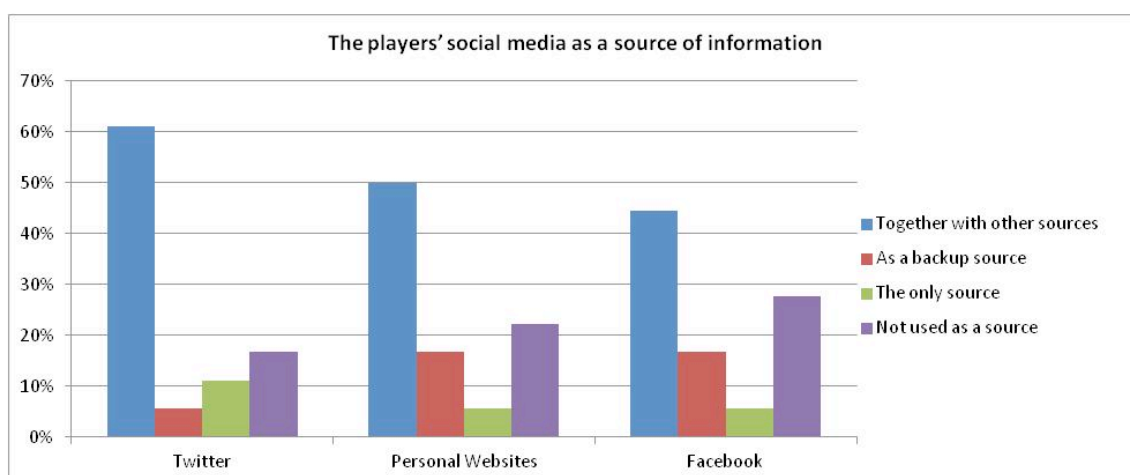
4.1.7. *The players’ social media as a source of information*

61% of the journalists say that they use the players’ Twitter profile along with other sources of information; 6% use it as a backup source; 11% as the only source; and 17% do not use it as a source.

With reference to the players personal Websites, 50% of the journalists use them along with other sources of information; 17% as a corroborating source; 6% as the only source; and 22% do not use them at all.

In terms of the footballers official Facebook profiles, 44% of the journalists use them along with other sources; 17% as a backup source; 6% as the only source; and 28% do not use them at all.

**Figure 7. The players’ social media as a source of information**



Compiled by the author.

#### 4.1.8. *The sports journalists' perception of the communication management of Real Madrid CF: qualitative analysis*

The journalists highlight the negative evolution of the relations with Communications department and this is made clear by the way that the journalists describe this relationship with words like “couldn't be worse”, “regression”, “tight secrecy”, “negative” or “from more to less”. They associate this behaviour with the club's business interests and admit that personal relationships with the department have faded away. Moreover, with regard to the current state of affairs, the journalists mention the negative features of the relationships with the media, using terms that express conflict such as: “nefarious”, “deplorable”, “wrong”, “awful”, “inadequate” or “control freak”. Their descriptions are based on the fact that the club's relationship with the media does not make the work of the journalists any easier.

In this sense, they say that the club's communication strategy is determined by the interests of its coach and consequently, the access to the traditional sources of information is controlled more, especially when it comes to the players. The journalists criticize the club's information control model used on the players. The statements of some of the interviewees stress that this behaviour hinders their work as journalists. Furthermore, in view of their answers, it is obvious that they want more transparency in the information provided. Indeed those interviewed go as far as to say that if the existing model is maintained, the role of the journalist will become superfluous to the advantage of the organisation's own media that is controlled by the club.

### 5. *Conclusions*

One aspect of the Real Madrid CF communication strategy is the trademark that has been created by controlling content and the dynamics used in the club's relationship with the traditional forms of media as the target audience. Those at the organisation admit that this definitely contributes to strengthening the emotional ties between the club and its supporters which is the exact opposite to what is happening between the club and the sports journalists, namely the conflict caused by the tight control of the Communications department over information.

As the social media visibility has increased along with the institution's international standing, the club's communications model has been shaped around the trademark and this has had various consequences: the professionalization of the Communications department, the implementation of communication media and platforms, more control over the messages and information passed on through these communication channels and the change in the target audience of the club's information from the sports journalists to its supporters and members.

The communications model of Real Madrid CF is based on establishing Public Relations and marketing strategies or initiatives that are focused on associating with the club's target audiences, namely, its supporters, fans and members. Hence the club's relations with the media have become superfluous, although they still have to be established even if it is just for cultural purposes, instead of for business or strategic decision-making.

Indeed, since the Communications department was set up, the communications management of Real Madrid CF has gone through three stages: the first, when the role of the Communications department was to satisfy the media, which was the main target audience; the second was when the trademark of each organisation had to be publicised through their

own forms of media while still acknowledging the importance of the mainstream media and maintaining the relations with the sports journalists as a target audience; and the current stage, in which there is a very tight control over communications and where the strategies, to a great extent, are affected by the personality and the influence of the coach.

In this context and considering the club's communication policy, the footballers have acquired a new role; they have become a reference point of information through the new forms of media that they themselves control, mainly from their own Website or on their own Facebook and Twitter profiles. With the personalised use of the ICT, the players, who are a source of information, now have a social and media dimension to them which has produced certain changes for the organisations and the sports journalists, seeing as the traditional way of keeping in touch with them, has also been altered. There is another factor: the control of the organisation's Communications department, as it establishes the times and dates when the players must see the media. On many occasions, this has resulted in the meetings being convened by the players' personal sponsors in places where the footballers see and speak to the sports journalists without the club intervening instead of them making statements in places run by the club, such as the press room.

The reporters think that the Communication department of Real Madrid CF has become a control mechanism and consequently, the personal relations between the two parties have deteriorated because of the limited access to information. According to the journalists, the Communications department is well known for controlling the information that is made available to the media and for hindering the work of the reporters.

The bidirectionality of communication between the journalists and the professionals of the past has turned into unidirectionality with the communications management of this department. Therefore, journalists call for more transparency and more facilities to make their job easier, which includes having access to the players, coaches and the management.

The future prospects for this profession are not very promising. The journalists think that the behaviour of the Communications department will continue on along the same lines: tight secrecy, control and restrictions over information. According to the journalists interviewed, the role of the traditional forms of media and that of the sports journalists will consequently become more superfluous in the information ecosystem of professional football.

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