



Crisis Communication and the Role of DirCom Professionals in the European Agri-Food Sector: A Comparative Study of Spain, France and Germany

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Abstract. The agri-food sector has been established as a strategic economic pillar, whilst concurrently facing mounting challenges regarding ensuring adequate food security. The present study analyses the manner in which communication managers (DirCom) in agri-food companies in Spain, France and Germany manage crises. The theoretical framework is rooted in the disciplines of strategic communication, risk situations and the evolution of the DirCom profile. It is asserted that digitalisation, social media and artificial intelligence (AI) function as instruments for proactive risk mitigation and interaction with audiences. Methodologically, the research employs a quantitative design, utilising a structured survey of communication professionals ($n = 28$) to explore their training, responsibilities, skills, preferred communication channels, outsourcing of services and use of AI in crisis contexts. The findings suggest that approximately 40% of companies have encountered a crisis in the last decade, with reputation management, internal guidance and proactive dissemination of information identified as their core functions. The key competencies are conflict resolution, leadership and organisational knowledge, with empathy and strategic vision as the most valued traits. The study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutions involved. Digital platforms and AI are increasingly used to monitor, generate content and respond quickly. The findings emphasise the pivotal role of strategic communication integrated with technology in mitigating risks, fostering public trust, and fortifying corporate resilience within the agri-food sector.

Keywords: agri-food, crisis communication, DirCom, organisational communication, artificial intelligence.

1 INTRODUCTION

The Spanish agri-food sector is consolidating its position as a strategic economic pillar. According to the most recent reports from the Spanish Food Industry (2024–2025) in the European Union, it constitutes the primary activity in the manufacturing industry, with a turnover of more than €1,196 billion, representing 15.7% of the manufacturing industry. Spain's ranking in terms of turnover places it fourth with 11.7% of market share, closely followed by Germany (18.5%) or France (17.6%). Spain has 304,120 companies employing 44.7 million people, with small and medium-sized

enterprises accounting for approximately 40% of total turnover and almost 57% of all jobs generated [1].

According to the most recent data from the National Institute of Statistics, Spain occupies the leading position in the manufacturing sector, with a food and beverage industry turnover exceeding €168 billion. This figure constitutes 23.8% of the sector, with 23.3% of people employed and 18.2% of added value, equivalent to 2.4% of Spain's Gross Domestic Product [2].

In 2025, the Spanish Food Safety and Nutrition Agency (AESAN) recorded 43 food alerts of public interest. The main risks identified included the presence of pathogens such as *Salmonella* in various meat products and spices; *Listeria monocytogenes* in cheeses, meat products and fish preserves; and Shiga toxin-producing *Escherichia coli* (STEC) in raw milk cheeses. Foreign bodies comprising metal, plastic and glass were also detected in a number of foodstuffs, along with psychoactive substances in confectionery and toxic alkaloids in corn-based and gluten-free products [3].

In order to manage crises in affected companies, there is a requirement for specialised communication professionals — Directors of Communication (DirCom) — who are capable of anticipating risks, coordinating responses and maintaining public trust. The role of the DirCom has evolved to incorporate competencies in public relations, risk management and digitalisation, with an increasing use of artificial intelligence tools to monitor health alerts, analyse public opinion, segment audiences and optimise the dissemination of critical messages in real time. Numerous companies also outsource communication and crisis management to specialised agencies to enhance their response capacity [4].

Communication strategies encompass a combination of conventional channels — press releases and media relations — with digital platforms and social media. This integration facilitates immediate interaction with stakeholders. Active listening, transparency and proactive communication are all essential to anticipate reputational and health impacts [5] [6]. In the European context, characterised by mounting regulatory and health complexity, strategic planning predicated on transparency, efficacious internal communication and multichannel coordination assumes paramount importance. The integration of AI has been demonstrated to enhance alert management, decision-making and response speed [7].

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 New Communication Paradigms in Digital Environments

The nature of relationships between organisations and their stakeholders has undergone a profound transformation as a result of digitalisation, the expansion of social media and the loss of unilateral control over corporate discourse [8]. Corporate communication has transitioned from a model predicated on information dissemination and control to one characterised by dialogue, multiplication of channels and active audience

participation, rendering strategic communication a pivotal element in organisational decision-making [9].

Strategic communication is defined as the deliberate application of communication to achieve organisational objectives, encompassing diverse academic disciplines and various stakeholders within a milieu characterised by pervasive connectivity and an abundance of information [10][11]. This scenario has increased organisations' exposure to disinformation, which is establishing itself as a major reputational risk [12], with recent reports highlighting its potential ramifications for the agri-food industry [13] [14].

Reputation has therefore emerged as a strategic asset associated with trust, compelling organisations to adopt proactive communication strategies that emphasise active listening, transparency and the integration of communication into business strategy, aligning with the priorities identified by European communication professionals [15] [16].

2.2 The Profile of the DirCom

The Director of Communication (DirCom) has established himself as a central strategic player in contemporary organisations, driven by digital transformation, media convergence and the growing importance of reputation and intangibles. Their evolution reflects the shift from an operational function to a managerial role that is cross-functional and aligned with the organisation's overall strategy, based on the integration of communication and information policies with the company as a whole [17] [18] [19]

The extant literature defines the current DirCom as a versatile and multidisciplinary professional with skills in strategic planning, coordination of internal and external communication, brand and reputation management — especially in digital environments — and crisis prevention and management [20] [21] [22]. New responsibilities have emerged from online communication, including digital reputation monitoring and content management. The traditional functions of documentation, strategic analysis and dissemination have undergone a process of sophistication and adaptation to evolving contexts [23] [24]

In highly complex or crisis scenarios, the DirCom plays a key role in anticipating risks and articulating communication responses based on transparency and consistency. The consolidation of the DirCom 2.0 model underscores the significance of competencies pertaining to creativity and content management [25] [26] The integration of AI and reputation monitoring systems reinforces the role of the DirCom as a strategic leader, responsible for aligning organisational objectives with audience expectations and ensuring long-term communicative sustainability.

2.3 Communication in Crisis Situations

Organisational communication has been proven to be a fundamental strategic resource for the internal functioning and external projection of organisations, exerting a

direct influence on cohesion, corporate identity and institutional reputation [27]. In crisis contexts, communication assumes a pivotal role, positioning the DirCom as a strategic manager of trust and organisational intangibles. Effective crisis management necessitates meticulous planning, effective leadership, swift execution of actions and the highest standards of transparency, as well as the capacity to proactively identify and mitigate reputational risks while coordinating with the media and the general public.

The main challenges of organisational communication are linked to digital transformation, professionalisation of the sector, management of cultural diversity and adaptation to complex and changing environments. Digitalisation has optimised processes but has also intensified demands in terms of information accuracy, transparency and technological skills [28]. The academic and ethical consolidation of the profession is imperative to enhance its legitimacy [29], while multiculturalism necessitates inclusive and strategic communication approaches that foster organisational cohesion [30]

The integration of artificial intelligence has facilitated progress towards predictive crisis management models, enabling sentiment analysis and early detection of negative narratives. However, its utilisation gives rise to ethical challenges pertaining to privacy and algorithmic biases [31]. Recent crises — notably the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020 — have underscored the significance of institutional communication founded on empathy, citizen participation and equitable access to information as pivotal components for fostering credibility and social support [32] [33]. Crisis communication is thus an indispensable strategic axis for organisational and democratic sustainability.

2.4 Channels and Emotions in the Agri-Food Sector

Crisis communication has been identified as a fundamental strategic element, especially in health contexts and sensitive sectors such as agri-food, where stakeholder uncertainty requires the building of trust, the reduction of risk perception and the promotion of compliance with the measures adopted [34]. Inadequate crisis management, typified by substandard institutional coordination, an absence of credentialed spokespersons and ineffectual utilisation of communication channels, erodes organisational credibility.

Digitalisation and Web 2.0 have transformed traditional crisis management by positioning corporate websites and digital platforms as key tools for information dissemination, stakeholder interaction and legitimacy building. Social networks — Facebook, Twitter and Instagram — permit instantaneous and direct communication with audiences, facilitate the monitoring of conversations and amplify the dissemination of messages. In the agri-food sector, these platforms play a central role in building reputation, communicating food risks and promoting consumption habits, while offering small and medium-sized enterprises an accessible tool to compete on equal terms with large corporations [35].

Despite the acknowledgement of social media as a pivotal medium for risk communication, numerous studies have highlighted that their utilisation remains predominantly unidirectional in many instances, constraining their capacity for dialogue and engagement (Regan et al., 2016). Active listening, professional community

management and consistency between messages disseminated in digital environments and traditional channels are crucial for strengthening credibility, especially in food or health crises. The analysis of emotions, narratives and interactions on social media has been identified as a strategic tool for risk anticipation and effective communication [36] [37].

2.5 The Use of Artificial Intelligence in Crisis Management

The contemporary crises facing companies are characterised by their increasing complexity, interdependence and systemic nature [38]. The utilisation of artificial intelligence as a pivotal instrument in the anticipation, management and prevention of crises is facilitated by advanced data analysis and predictive decision-making capabilities. The integration of technologies underpinned by big data and AI facilitates a transition from conventional reactive methodologies, thereby enhancing organisations' predictive capabilities through the automated analysis of substantial data sets encompassing operational indicators, internal communications and social media discourse [39].

In domains such as food security and natural resource management, AI plays a pivotal role in simulating risk scenarios, optimising supply chains and facilitating more efficient and sustainable planning [40]. The integration of AI within corporate and communication management has become a strategic asset, facilitating data-driven decision-making processes, anticipating potential reputational threats and enhancing responsiveness in highly uncertain digital environments [41]. However, the implementation of such systems necessitates the establishment of robust ethical and regulatory frameworks ensuring transparency, accountability and the responsible use of data, particularly in contexts characterised by structural inequalities [42]. The responsible integration of AI offers organisations a competitive advantage and contributes to the development of more resilient, sustainable and socially committed management models [43]

3 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Given the quantitative design of this study, the following research questions (RQ) were formulated prior to data collection:

RQ1. What is the professional profile (training, functions and competencies) of DirCom professionals in agri-food companies in Spain, France and Germany?

RQ2. What communication channels do DirCom professionals prioritise in crisis situations in the three countries?

RQ3. To what extent are artificial intelligence tools integrated into crisis communication management in the European agri-food sector?

RQ4. Are there significant differences in crisis communication practices between Spain, France and Germany?

4 METHODOLOGY

4.1 Research Design and Variables

The present study adopts a quantitative methodological design, supported by a prior literature review and the application of a structured survey as the principal technique for collecting empirical data. The survey is directed towards communication managers (DirCom) in agri-food sector companies, with the objective of identifying the professional profile of the individual responsible for crisis prevention and/or management, as well as analysing the communication channels employed, the forms of relationship with audiences, and the utilisation of outsourcing services or AI tools in this domain.

The variables of the study are defined as follows. The dependent variables are: (1) crisis communication management practices (crisis manual availability, channel selection, AI adoption); and (2) DirCom professional profile (training, functions, personal competencies). The independent variables are: (1) country of origin (Spain, France, Germany); (2) company size (large enterprise vs. SME); and (3) experience of crisis in the last decade (yes/no). The control variables are: (1) sector of activity within agri-food; and (2) type of company (public vs. private).

4.2 Sample and Inclusion Criteria

The initial contact was made during Fruit Attraction 2025, a prominent international trade fair within the agri-food sector. Subsequently, questionnaires were disseminated via email to a total of 100 agri-food companies across the three countries. Following a non-probability convenience sampling approach, considered appropriate for the exploratory nature of the study, a total of 28 valid responses were received, representing a response rate of 28%. The final sample comprised 28 communication managers from companies in Spain, France and Germany: 18 from Spain, 5 from Germany and 5 from France.

The inclusion criteria were as follows: (1) the respondent must hold a managerial or senior communication role within the company; (2) the company must operate in the agri-food sector; and (3) the company must be headquartered or have a significant commercial presence in Spain, France or Germany. Companies with no designated communication manager or DirCom function were excluded.

The selection of the three countries was based on strategic and contextual criteria. France was chosen due to its geographical proximity to Spain and its relevance in agri-food crisis scenarios (notably the listeria and salmonella outbreaks documented in recent years). Germany was selected on the basis of its academic and scientific weight in the field of communication — particularly as the headquarters of the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) — and its status as the leading country in Europe in terms of the agri-food sector business model. It should be acknowledged that the sample size is a limitation of the study, and the findings should be interpreted as exploratory rather than fully generalisable.

4.3 Instrument and Ethical Considerations

The research instrument consists of a structured questionnaire of 14 items, designed to provide a direct response to the objectives and research questions set. The questionnaire included binary questions, multiple-choice items and Likert-type value scales. It was created using Google Forms, which facilitated agile management of the instrument and optimised the data collection and systematisation process.

The questionnaire was drafted originally in Spanish and subsequently translated into French and German by native-speaking communication professionals. The translations were reviewed for conceptual equivalence rather than literal accuracy to ensure cross-linguistic validity. No formal back-translation was carried out, which constitutes a limitation that should be considered when comparing country-level results.

The questionnaire instrument is provided as Appendix A. With regard to ethical considerations, the study was conducted in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutions involved. All participants provided informed consent prior to completing the questionnaire, and anonymity was guaranteed throughout the data collection and analysis process. No sensitive personal data were collected, and no ethical committee approval was sought given the non-sensitive and voluntary nature of the study; however, the authors acknowledge that this represents an area for improvement in future research in line with evolving standards of research ethics in communication studies.

The utilisation of online surveys confers a number of advantages, including reduced costs, expedited response collection and the capacity for the implementation of automatic filters in the selection of the sample. Furthermore, the anonymity and privacy afforded by this format have been demonstrated to encourage greater sincerity on the part of participants [44].

5 RESULTS

5.1 Description of the Sample

The majority of respondents held the title of Director of Communication or Head of Communication, with a smaller proportion occupying the role of Communication Manager or similar. The companies represented ranged from large multinational corporations to medium-sized enterprises, reflecting the diversity of the European agri-food sector. A salient finding of the study is that nearly 40% of the surveyed companies ($n=11$) have encountered a crisis within the last decade, while 17 companies reported no crisis experience in recent years.

5.2 Training and Professional Profile

With regard to the fundamental training required to undertake communication tasks in crisis situations, 57.1% of respondents expressed the opinion that it should be specialised training in risk, social media or languages. In contrast, 39.3% of respondents

believed that it should be a degree in journalism and/or a master's degree in communication. Specifically, 32.1% of respondents believe that the basic training should be a degree in advertising and public relations; 25% in law; 10.7% in business economics; 7.1% in audiovisual communication; and 1.6% in artificial intelligence, higher education, crisis management, food engineering or technology, or psychology and human resources.

By country, German companies prioritise degrees in journalism, advertising and public relations, master's degrees in communication and specialised training in crisis management, social media and languages. In Spain, specialised training (54.1%), master's degrees in communication and degrees in journalism (41.6%), as well as advertising, law, economics, audiovisual communication, artificial intelligence, psychology and other areas are valued. French companies demonstrate a clear preference for professionals in the fields of journalism, advertising, crisis training, networking, languages and master's degrees in communication.

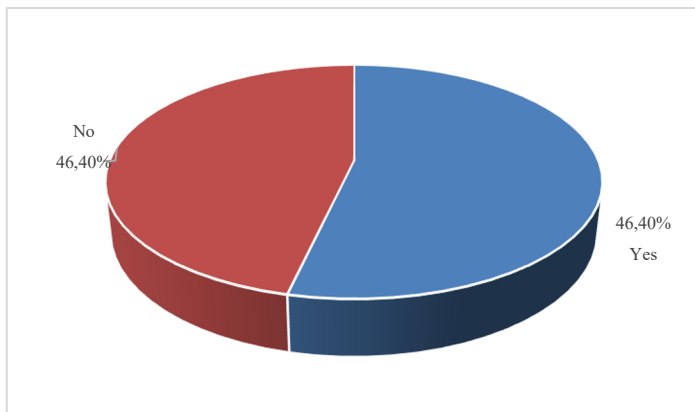


Figure 1. Does it have a crisis manual?

Source: This survey was conducted among communications managers employed by companies operating within the sector. The product has been prepared internally.

5.3 Crisis Protocols and Manuals

In response to the question regarding the existence of a communication manual or protocol for crisis situations, 53.6% of respondents affirm the presence of such a document, while 46.4% respond in the negative. Of the companies that have experienced crisis situations, 63.6% have an action protocol or crisis manual, while 36.3% do not.

Regarding the perceived necessity of such a manual, 28.6% of respondents assigned a value of 10 out of 10; 14.3% assigned a value of 9; 21.4% assigned a value between 7 and 8; 7.1% assigned a value of 6; and 3.6% assigned a value between 4 and 5 points. French companies rate the need for such a manual at 10, while in Spain, the

rating ranges from 4 to 10 depending on the company. In Germany, none have experienced a crisis recently, although some have preventive manuals and rate their necessity between 7 and 8.

5.4 Functions of the DirCom in Crisis Situations

It is acknowledged that a communications director is charged with fundamental responsibilities in the management of business risk scenarios. According to the findings, 89.3% of respondents recognise that the primary function of a communications director is to “build and maintain the company’s reputation”. The subsequent function, identified by 67.9% of respondents, is to provide guidance to company personnel and/or the expeditious management of information. Meanwhile, 57.1% prioritise internal communication, and 53.6% indicate that relations with the media should be a primary focus. In addition, 50% of respondents assert that strengthening the communication function and supporting management and/or combating misinformation are primary functions. A further 42.9% selected addressing the audience’s demand for transparency and/or aligning business and communication strategies; 21.4% highlighted social responsibility and sustainable development; and 7.1% selected using big data and communication algorithms.

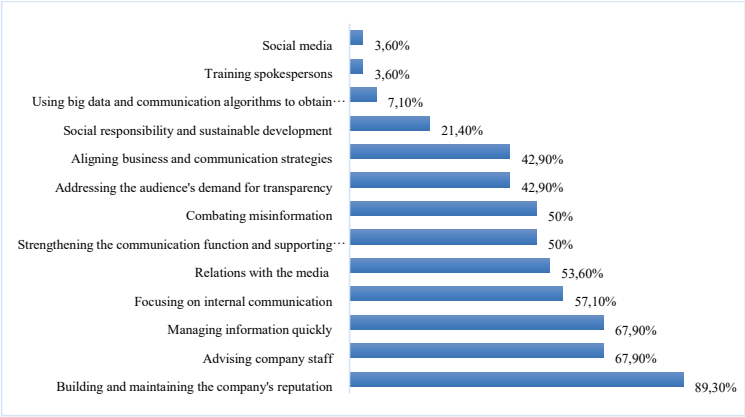


Figure 2. Basic functions for managing a business risk situation

Source: This survey was conducted among communications managers employed by companies operating within the sector. The product has been prepared internally.

German companies place significant emphasis on advising staff, maintaining reputation, managing information, media relations, internal communication and combating misinformation. French companies have expanded these functions to include transparency with the audience, utilisation of big data, training of spokespersons, coordination with other areas and social responsibility. Spanish companies place significant emphasis on upholding a positive reputation, providing guidance to their personnel, fortifying their communication capabilities, ensuring transparency, aligning with business strategy, and managing both traditional and social media.

5.5 Competencies and Personality Traits

In relation to fundamental competencies, 71.4% of respondents assert that the most essential skill for the individual tasked with communication during a crisis is conflict resolution. This is followed by the capacity to prevent crises (67.9%) and knowledge about the organisation (64.3%). Leadership was identified by 57.1% of respondents, followed by organisational skills and persuasive communication (46.4%), a sense of timing (39.3%) and business strategy (35.7%). The least voted skills are public affairs (25%), motivation (21.4%), negotiation, branding and languages (17.9%), consensus building and change management (14.3%), project management (10.7%) and economics (0%).

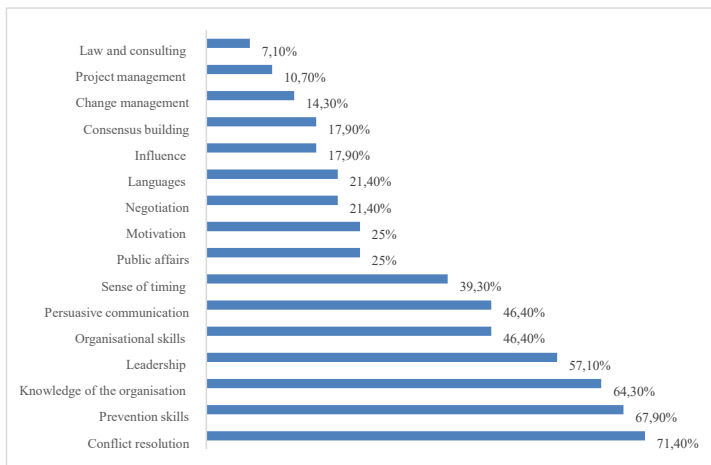


Figure 3. Skills

Source: This survey was conducted among communications managers employed by companies operating within the sector. The product has been prepared internally.

With regard to personality traits, the most valued are empathy (60.7%), leadership (57.1%), trustworthiness (53.6%), integrity (50%), team spirit, calmness and global strategic vision (46.4%), stress resistance (42.9%), and experience, diplomacy, sociability and negotiation (35.7%).

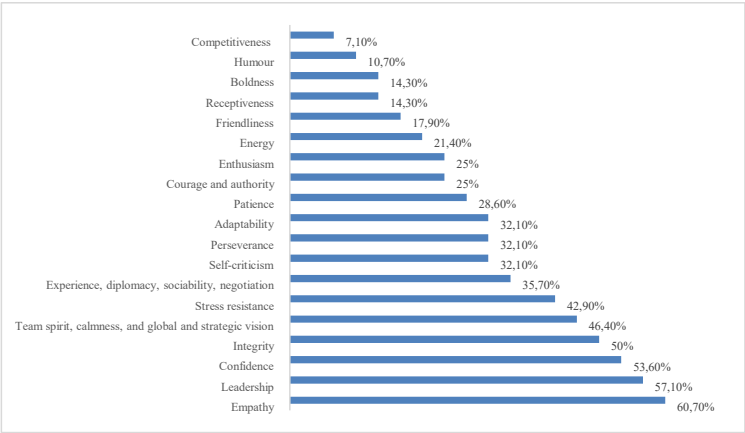


Figure 4. Personality

Source: This survey was conducted among communications managers employed by companies operating within the sector. The product has been prepared internally.

Differences are observed by country: Germany’s educational philosophy is predicated on values including empathy, integrity, self-awareness, composure, leadership, perseverance, diplomacy and adaptability. France values empathy, team spirit, negotiation, integrity, sociability, self-criticism, strategic vision, diplomacy and resilience. Spain’s profile encompasses empathy, confidence, leadership, strategic vision, calmness, experience, stress resistance, integrity, adaptability, perseverance, negotiation, diplomacy, authenticity and sociability.

5.6 Channels Used in Crisis Situations

The results indicate that the preferred channels during a crisis are the corporate web-site, email and intranet (or any other online communication channel) (75%), followed by social media (71.4%), digital print media (60.7%) and proprietary media (57.1%). Mobile communication was indicated by 28.6% of respondents, radio and television by 25%, and print media and/or newsletters by 21.4%. Events were not identified as a crisis communication channel by any respondent. Germany places a high priority on print,

digital, web, intranet, newsletter, mobile communication and social media; France utilises a variety of print, digital, online and social media forms; Spain has a diverse media landscape encompassing traditional and digital formats.

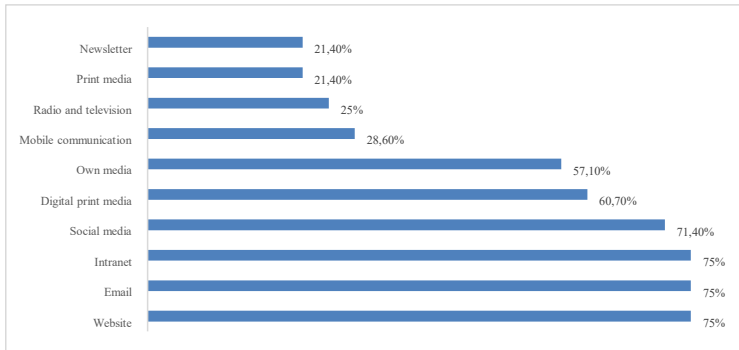


Figure 5. Channels most used during a crisis situation

Source: This survey was conducted among communications managers employed by companies operating within the sector. The product has been prepared internally.

5.7 Outsourcing of Communication Services

In response to the question regarding the company's customary practice of engaging external communication services, 50% of respondents indicated affirmation, 17.9% indicated occasional utilisation and 32.1% indicated a negative response. Of the companies that outsource, 75% stated that the primary service they procure is graphic design, followed by social media management (70%), video editing (50%) and event organisation (40%). A smaller percentage cited crisis management and report writing (15%), press release writing (10%), and media relations or newsletter editing (5%). None of the companies surveyed reported outsourcing spokesperson training.

5.8 Use of Artificial Intelligence

The survey data indicates that 32.1% of all companies surveyed employ AI tools for the management of crises. Of these, 36.4% use AI to generate content and seek inspiration; 27.3% use it to generate reports on the crisis, write automatically, monitor news and prepare speeches; 18.2% use it to analyse and monitor social media and transcripts; and 9.1% use it to automate responses, manage the crisis in its entirety and monitor misinformation.

In the cohort of companies that have not experienced a crisis in recent years ($n = 18$), four acknowledge the utilisation of AI for the management of risk situations, and notably all of these companies are Spanish. The uses cited include sentiment analysis and social media monitoring, the generation of campaign impact reports, media monitoring and tracking mentions in the press, seeking inspiration, the automation of responses on social media and audience engagement, the automatic drafting of press releases and reports, and speech writing.

5.9 Principal Challenges for the Sector

The survey inquired about the primary challenges anticipated to be faced by the sector in the ensuing decade. The following trends were identified: the combating of misinformation (53.6%); the importance of linking business strategy and communication (50%); coping with the speed and volume of information flow (46.4%); addressing sustainable development and social responsibility, and building and maintaining trust (42.9%); the use of big data and/or algorithms for communication (39.3%); exploring new ways to create and distribute content (28.6%); addressing digital evolution and the social web (25%); and the digitisation of communication processes with internal and external stakeholders (21.4%).

6 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study demonstrate the strategic importance of communication in crisis management in the European agri-food sector, particularly in a context characterised by global food insecurity, increasing regulatory complexity and the acceleration of information flows. The analysis confirms that crises are not exceptional events, but recurring scenarios: 40% of the companies surveyed acknowledge having experienced a crisis situation in the last decade. This finding aligns with the situational crisis communication theory (SCCT) advanced by [22], which posits that crisis responsibility and reputational threat are determining variables in the selection of response strategies. In this regard, the data underscores the necessity to consolidate preventive, structured and professionalised communication models capable of anticipating risks and preserving the confidence of the various stakeholders.

A persistent discrepancy has been identified between the theoretical recognition of the importance of planning and its practical implementation. Despite more than half of the organisations surveyed asserting that they possess crisis response manuals or protocols, a considerable proportion continue to be devoid of such mechanisms, even among those that have previously encountered critical episodes. This deficit is especially problematic within a sector where health alerts, misinformation and media pressure can rapidly amplify reputational and economic impacts. This finding resonates with the literature on effective crisis communication, which emphasises planning, speed and transparency as the pillars of organisational response [38] y [6]

The study corroborates the consolidation of the Director of Communications as a pivotal strategic figure in crisis management. The most valued functions — building

and maintaining reputation, advising senior management and managing information with agility — demonstrate a conception of the DirCom aligned with contemporary approaches to strategic communication [10] [9]. The most prominent personal skills and characteristics, such as empathy, prevention, conflict resolution and leadership, reinforce the notion advanced by [5] that crisis management is not merely technical in nature but requires the presence of emotional, ethical and relational competencies. This finding is particularly relevant in the agri-food context, where trust with consumers and regulatory bodies is built over long periods and can be lost rapidly.

Regarding channels of communication, the results confirm the centrality of the digital ecosystem: corporate websites, email, intranets and social media have emerged as the predominant tools for crisis management, gradually superseding traditional channels. However, the study demonstrates that the utilisation of these spaces predominantly functions as a source of information in a unidirectional manner, constraining their capacity for dialogue and active listening, as also highlighted by [37]. This trend poses a significant challenge for the sector, especially in an environment where consumer confidence is built on consistency, interaction and transparency.

The research highlights the still incipient but growing adoption of artificial intelligence tools in crisis communication. Although merely a third of companies report utilising AI, its applications — primarily content generation, media monitoring and sentiment analysis — point to a paradigm shift towards predictive and data-driven models, as advanced by [39] and [41]). However, the restricted utilisation of these technologies also underscores the necessity for advancement in specialised training, ethical frameworks and integrated strategies, a concern that aligns with the warnings raised by [42] regarding algorithmic accountability and responsible data use.

In conclusion, this study contributes to the understanding of crisis communication in the European agri-food sector by highlighting the need to strengthen strategic planning, professionalise communication profiles and promote a more advanced, ethical and participatory use of digital channels and artificial intelligence. Future research should seek to expand the sample size across the three countries, incorporate qualitative dimensions such as in-depth interviews with DirCom professionals, and develop validated instruments for comparative cross-national studies of crisis communication. The consolidation of the DirCom as a strategic leader — equipped with both technical and relational competencies — emerges as a central recommendation for the sector.

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The authors have no competing interests to declare that are relevant to the content of this article.

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APPENDIX A: SURVEY INSTRUMENT

The following questionnaire was administered to communication managers (DirCom) in agri-food companies in Spain, France and Germany. It was originally

drafted in Spanish and translated into French and German by native-speaking professionals.

Q1. Has your company experienced a crisis situation in the last decade? (Yes / No)

Q2. What added value does the communications department bring to your organisation? (Multiple choice)

Q3. What basic training should a communications professional handling crises have? (Multiple choice)

Q4. Does your company have a communication manual or protocol for crisis situations? (Yes / No)

Q5. On a scale of 1–10, how necessary do you consider a crisis manual or protocol to be?

Q6. What are the main functions of the communications director in a crisis situation? (Multiple choice)

Q7. What skills should a communications manager have in a crisis? (Multiple choice)

Q8. What personal characteristics should a communications manager have? (Multiple choice)

Q9. On a scale of 1–10, how much value do you attribute to having a communications department team?

Q10. What channels do you consider necessary to use during a crisis? (Multiple choice)

Q11. Does your company usually hire external communication services? (Yes / Occasionally / No)

Q12. If yes, which external services do you typically procure? (Multiple choice)

Q13. What are the main challenges you anticipate for the sector in the coming decade? (Multiple choice)

Q14. Does your company use artificial intelligence tools in crisis situations? If so, for what specific purpose? (Multiple choice)

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