

Dr. María-Aparecida FERRARI

School of Communication and Arts – University of Sao Paulo. Brazil. maferrar@usp.br

Juliane MARTINS

Federal University of Paraná. Brazil. professorajuliane@ufpr.br

Victor THEODORO

University of Beira Interior. Portugal. victortheodoro1@hotmail.com

Teaching and learning in Public Relations degrees in Brazil: incorporation of digital platforms

Enseñanza y aprendizaje en las carreras de Relaciones Públicas de Brasil: incorporación de plataformas digitales

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Abstract

Research into the introduction of digital tools in the teaching of Public Relations degrees in Brazil is still in its early stages. The dramatic technological revolution has had a profound impact on society and, consequently, has caused changes in communication management within the frame of Brazilian organizations. Information and Communication technologies (ICTs) have become relevant facilitators in the communication process. This scenario has compelled Public Relations programmes to adopt new tools and methodologies to support teaching practices required to address the new students' learning profiles. Research conducted using qualitative and quantitative methodologies highlighted the adoption of new technologies as the preferred strategies for motivating and inducing student interest and for addressing the digital transformation of communication. For today's organizations, the new technologies have also led to an increased demand for transparency by the users. Notwithstanding the importance of the new technologies, their effectiveness is conditioned on their full integration into the academic development of each student. The reflection on the role of Information and Communication technologies in the context of Public Relations should focus not solely on new tools and methodologies but also on the preparation of competent professionals able to create better communications for society as a whole.

Keywords

Public Relations; teaching-learning; teaching practices; digital platforms; active learning

Resumen

Investigaciones acerca de la incorporación de plataformas digitales en las carreras de Relaciones Públicas es algo reciente en Brasil. La vertiginosa revolución tecnológica ha impactado la sociedad y, como consecuencia, ha provocado cambios en la gestión de la comunicación en las organizaciones. Las Tecnologías de Información y Comunicación (TICs) se han convertido en grandes facilitadoras del proceso comunicacional. Ese escenario ha obligado a las carreras de Relaciones Públicas a adoptar nuevas metodologías y herramientas para apoyar las prácticas pedagógicas frente al nuevo perfil de los estudiantes. Es sobre ese trasfondo que se realizó la presente investigación, que empleó una combinación de técnicas cuantitativas y cualitativas. Los resultados destacan la adopción de tecnologías como estrategia para motivar el interés de los estudiantes y para responder a la transformación digital de la comunicación de las organizaciones contemporáneas, una vez que los públicos exigen cada vez más transparencia. Cabe destacar, sin embargo, que, pese a que las tecnologías estén consideradas importantes aportes, su eficacia debe estar condicionada a su plena integración en el proceso formativo del estudiante. A modo de conclusión, la reflexión acerca de las TICs en el ámbito de la práctica de las Relaciones Públicas debe estar centrada no solo en nuevas herramientas, sino en la capacidad de las herramientas para preparar profesionales capaces de producir una mejor comunicación a la sociedad.

Palabras clave

Relaciones Públicas; enseñanza-aprendizaje; prácticas pedagógicas; plataformas digitales; aprendizaje activo

1. Introduction

Digital technology has changed the conditions of knowledge generation and information processing in contemporary society (Castells, 2002). This has modified the way and speed with which people communicate (Rosas Chávez, 2017). As Castells (2002) points out, this technological revolution has impacted how institutions and organizations process information, generate knowledge, and use Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs).

In regards to formal education, technologies have transformed social interactions and access to information beyond classroom walls; likewise, new ways of teaching and learning that underscore the interaction between real and virtual life have also emerged (Tezani, 2017). The impact of ICTs in the educational system has created educational methods capable of improving the quality of education for students and revolutionizing the way information is obtained, handled and interpreted.

As Prensky (2001) explains, generations born in the digital age, that is, so-called digital natives, are characterized as capable of multitasking and being selective regarding information. In addition, they do not choose activities solely based on a perceived benefit and seek satisfaction in their endeavors. Students of this new generation may experience difficulties concentrating for long periods in class lectures; they fail to read extensively and use technologies excessively, which competes with other activities such as critical thinking while reading and problem solving.

In analyzing the professional practice of public relations in Brazil, we find a very specialized profession with a premise rooted in ethics and transparency in relationship management, which prizes the role of the scenario analyst (Ferrari, 2011) and plays a highly strategic role in weighing public perceptions of an organization (Grunig, 2011).

With the advent of digital technology, the public relations function in organizations began to incorporate a series of digital instruments and platforms that on one hand facilitated the work of communicators, but on the other increased its vulnerability as it became impossible to monitor all the information produced in this new environment (Paskin, 2013). As a result, communicators will likely be unable to process the amount of data and information, which can easily generate fake news, a phenomenon very typical of the "post-truth" era (Menéndez, Peiro, Berbell and Serrano Martínez, 2018).

Considering the new role of the public relations professional in the digital age (DiStaso, Stacks and Botan, 2009; Paskin, 2013; Kunsch, 2017), the objectives of this article are to identify the incorporation of technology in pedagogical practices to foster learning in public relations programs, identify technological tools selected by professors in the classroom, and verify the work infrastructure with digital platforms.

It should be noted that empirical research on pedagogical practices and technology in teaching-learning processes in public relations programs in Brazil is scarce (Ferrari, 2017a). Similar studies published in scientific journals in the country have not been found. For this reason, the results presented in this article are unpublished and serve to (re)think teaching-learning methods and technological tools that promote interaction between teacher and student. Two questions guided the research: What methodologies do public relations professors use to approach digital students and prepare them for contemporary organizations? And what tools do professors adopt in their pedagogical practices?

The text identifies the transformations of higher education in Brazil in public relations academic programs and presents the results obtained through a two-phase research process, one quantitative and the other qualitative, together with professors of the Brazilian public relations programs. The research was conducted between 2016 and 2018 and financed by the The São Paulo Research Foundation (Fapesp, for its acronym in Portuguese).

1.2. Observations on higher education in Brazil in recent decades

Higher education in Brazil has undergone important change starting from 1990 as a result of national regulations aimed to adapt to global conceptions of continuing education. This led to the introduction of lifelong learning incentives, and the inclusion of technology in professor and student training, thus highlighting the importance of people's continued experiences beyond formal education (Coll, 2013).

The economic opening of the country, intensified by the privatization of higher education, resulted in an increase in the number of undergraduate programs, technological programs, and the inclusion of blended and distance learning (Instituto Nacional de Estudos e Pesquisas Educacionais Anísio Teixeira [Inep], 2014). This reality reveals the relevance that technologies have attained in Brazilian education today, which have extended the learning possibilities of students in their personal and professional training. In response, higher

education institutions (HEIs) have attempted to implement policies that include the diversification of educational modalities and the integration of open resources, tools and digital platforms in the teaching-learning process.

Against this backdrop, higher level programs received curricular guidelines that awarded special attention to the profiles of graduates based on competencies and flexibility of curricula. From this perspective, we sought to underscore the need for lifelong learning in a context of constant socio-labor transformations (Coll, 2013). To train future citizens and professionals, it is vital to abandon the closed curriculum model containing fragmented subjects.

1.3. Public relations in Brazil: The role of academia in the assessment of professional practice

The history of public relations in Brazil is different from that of other countries in the world. The profession began in 1914 with the establishment of the public relations department at the Canadian company Light & Power in the city of São Paulo (Ferrari, 2017a). Up until 1960, the practice of the profession had been in the hands of amateurs who sought knowledge by making trips to other countries or attending short courses promoted by the School of Business, Economics and Accounting at the University of São Paulo, the Getúlio Vargas Foundation, the Institute of Labor Organization and the Pontifical Catholic University of Rio de Janeiro.

Between 1964 and 1985, also known as the "lead years", Brazil was ruled by a repressive military dictatorship that curbed freedom of expression in the media and assumed control of the entire information system. In 1967, within the context of authoritarianism, Law 5.377 was created to establish the regulation of the public relations profession. The idea was to define "who does what", with the clear intention of controlling "who does it". Other Latin American countries, however, did not follow the example of Brazil, which became the first country to adopt specific legislation for the practice of public relations. In that same year, the first higher degree program was created at the University of São Paulo.

In this context, it is worth highlighting the creation of the Federal Council of Public Relations Professionals (Conferp, for its acronym in Portuguese) and its regional councils in 1969, whose function was and continues to be the supervision of the profession. Thus, in accordance with Law 5.377, the practice of the profession is limited to those who hold an undergraduate degree in public relations and the respective professional registration granted by the CONFERP system.

The creation of specific legislation and an undergraduate degree played a catalytic role in the growth of teaching and promotion of scientific research in public relations in Brazil. The first Master's degree program was created in the 1970s, which was followed in 1980 by a PhD program in Communications, with an emphasis on public relations. The boom in academic growth in public relations occurred in 2009, when there were 112 higher-level programs in the entire country. Since then, the number has dropped considerably, mostly in private HEIs, from 75 in 2014 to 53 in 2018.

The curriculum structure of public relations programs in Brazil does not include specific subjects for teacher training since the program's profile is primarily focused on the student's entry into the business world. Post graduate programs in the strictest sense, i.e. master's degree and doctorate programs, emphasize student-led research rather than specific professor training (Ferrari, 2017a).

Historically, the training of professors of public relations programs in Brazil has been based on knowledge obtained at the undergraduate level, which has long been considered sufficient to train teachers for that educational level. This mentality dismisses the acquisition of necessary pedagogical knowledge for the teaching practice, which can result in countless distortions in daily practices.

Starting in 2013, public relations programs in Brazil began to adopt new curricular guidelines that moved program directors towards a pedagogical reformulation. The proposals highlighted the integration of theory and practice, the introduction of interdisciplinary projects, the reinforcement of language, media and technology skills, and laboratory activities that allow the development of professional practice experiences. Specific competencies required for the program include the following: knowledge of techniques and instruments specific to the development of the public relations practice and understanding of technological innovations (Parecer 85, 2013).

In light of contemporary social dynamics, the inclusion of ICTs came to be considered essential for public relations curricula. However, this poses a challenge for professors in the field since not all master these technologies (V. Rhoden and J. Rhoden, 2017). The new context overthrows the traditional vision and gives rise to other forms of practicing teaching today and in the future. Public and private organizations, NGOs

and communication agencies are looking for public relations professionals who are proficient in technology and are capable of dealing with big data in increasingly shorter times (Kunsch, 2017).

In a study on the most valued skills among public relations students as described by professionals in the field, Paskin (2013: 252) points out that both traditional and new skills should be combined with the concept of convergence in mind. The author states, "teach students writing, research and planning by using Facebook and Twitter; explain newsletters through graphic design and Photoshop; explain crisis management while publishing a blog".

In a study conducted in Brazil, Vergili (2014) highlighted that future public relations professionals need to build relationships with publics of interest on social networks; to this purpose, he suggested learning and using metrics, content analysis, SEO (Search Engine Optimization), as well as a programming language.

According to Álvarez-Flores, Núñez-Gómez and Olivares-Santamarina (2018), the digital evolution forced communicators to shape their professional profiles with competences to create, transform and distribute information through various traditional and digital media. For example, today's professionals need to be able to understand the flow of audiences on the Internet, manage simultaneous identities on social platforms, and work and collaborate remotely. With this, new job opportunities abound for public relations professionals.

According to Coll (2013), it is important to take into account the variety of formal and informal education options available to professors so they can achieve qualified learning, such as virtual platforms and tools that help with communication and collaboration (Bermúdez-Rodríguez and Fueyo-Gutiérrez, 2018). Digital resources can facilitate the transmission of knowledge (Quintanilha, 2017), such as the educational tool Moodle, digital platforms (Google Drive, Dropbox, Issuu), social networks (Facebook, Twitter, YouTube) and applications (WhatsApp).

To this purpose, the professor needs to be aware of and know how to use the technological tools available so they can be used daily in class to stimulate the learning process (Zabalza, 2007; Paskin, 2013; V. Rhoden and J. Rhoden, 2017), such as discussion forums or application development. Professors need to understand the current influence of technologies on social reality, and know how to take advantage of the use of certain pedagogical practices (Salcines-Talledo, González-Fernández and Briones, 2017).

Cobo and Moravec emphasize that contemporary social demands cannot be met solely with a traditional model of education, be it face-to-face or virtual, in which professors speak to their students. The authors emphasize that:

the traditional model of education needs to be considered from new perspectives. This does not mean adding an "e-" at the beginning to make it better. Nor is it enough to acquire certain technological devices or incorporate some international quality certification or standard.

Education demands ecological, systemic, long-term improvement that is also inclusive (Cobo and Moravec, 2011: 19-20, translation).

Bringing together teaching-learning methodologies and technological supports (Masetto and Zukowsky-Tavares, 2015; Zabalza, 2007) allows pedagogical practices to be more motivating and promotes the creativity of students. When professors understand the potential of using these languages and codes, it will be possible to increase the production of students, who will come to understand the construction of knowledge as a path towards learning (Marcelo, 2013).

In the compilation of Brazilian literature on public relations, two innovative proposals that used technology as a pedagogical support were identified. The first is the "Public Relations and Management Simulator" (SimRPG), developed in a doctoral thesis that proposed the use of business games adapted to the public relations field through the use of software where students simulate management activities monitored by the professor (A. Grohs and L. Grohs, 2019). The second is the "Public Relations in Cinema Portal", an extension project created as a repository of educational content on public relations themes in which the professor has a script of contents and practical activities (Silva and Henriques, 2018).

It is also worth mentioning the development of a joint project between the Advertising and Public Relations degree at the University of Seville (Spain) and the Public Relations degree at the Paulista State University (Brazil) called "From class to account" (www.delaclasselacuenta.com). Students from both institutions organized themselves into agencies to plan and develop a campaign for a real client. To do this, they created different content, in e-learning and blended formats, with activities carried out remotely with the mediation of ICTs. Professors used electronic platforms to share texts and videos to motivate the creation of discussion groups from a flipped classroom perspective. At the end of each edition, the agencies' proposals were presented at an international event broadcast live for both institutions and evaluated by

Brazilian and Spanish juries (Cabral, Ruiz, Santos, Porém, Andrelo and Guaraldo, 2017). The initiative also aimed to foster intercultural communication between the two groups of students and evaluate the relationships between students and professors through daily practices, the use of language, and ICTs as contact support between the agencies.

The previously mentioned examples demonstrate that technology has the ability to modify the role of the professor who, through the use of ICTs, assumes the role of "counselor". This modified role favors a new relationship with students in which they cease acting as receivers to assume a leading role in the process (Gil, 2013). According to Casablancas (2017), transformations in the field of pedagogy occur from the bottom-up; that is, it is students who, through their own demands, push professors to bring technologies to the classroom.

However, being a professor in higher education requires more than mastering technology, since the three activities mentioned reinforce the complexity of the pedagogical practice of teaching and the need for contextualization (Lourenço, Lima and Narciso, 2016) both in relation to sociocultural aspects as well as new business models.

2. Methodology

Since 2015, we have been conducting a range of studies to learn more about the training path of public relations students in Brazil, and identify teaching-learning methods and the use of technologies applied by professors in these programs. The objective of this article is to reflect on the link between the use of pedagogical practices adopted by the professor and learning technologies in public relations programs.

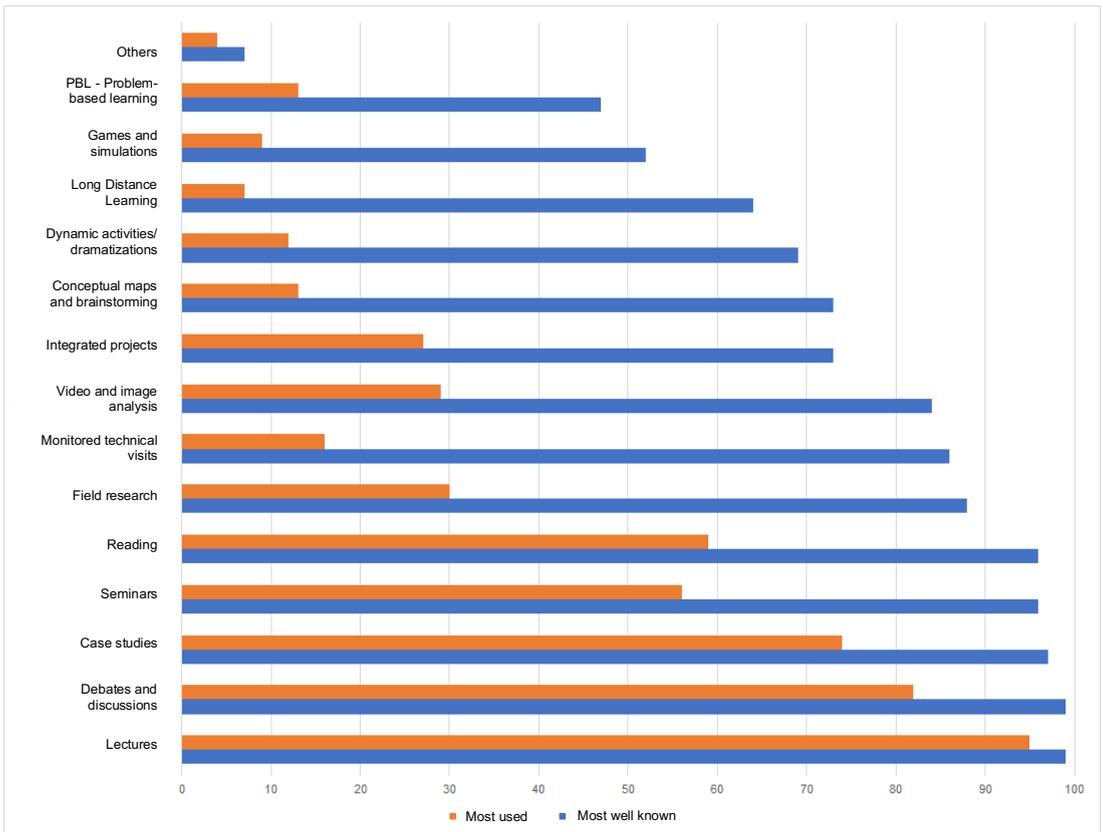
The study was divided into two stages. In the first, a quantitative technique was used with a questionnaire addressed to professors of public relations programs in Brazil. The instrument contained 33 questions (23 closed and ten open-ended) that addressed the professor's profile, work routine, pedagogical notions, and teaching methods, based on the classification of Gil (2013). After conducting a pretest with five professors selected at random and, after making adjustments, the questionnaire was distributed through the Survio platform between August and November 2016. The survey was answered by 255 professors (75% out of a total of 342 professors), which represented approximately 80% of the public relations programs in the country (see appendix). Of the 255 professors, 164 (64%) worked in private HEIs and 91 (36%) in public HEIs. The information collected was processed with the support of the statistical software Minitab and SPSS.

The second stage featured a qualitative approach and consisted of interviews with professors selected based on the following profile: holding a degree in public relations and being responsible for teaching specific subjects of the program such as Strategic Planning and Theory and History of Public Relations. The script for the interview questions included the profile of the professor, the course, teaching-learning practices, use of digital tools, and results observed with students. Between March and July 2018, 22 interviews were conducted with professors who agreed to participate in the study. The interviews lasted an average of 60 minutes and were conducted in person or via Skype or Hangout, depending on the availability of the professors and the interviewers. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Afterward, categories for content analysis were established according to Bardin (2016) and detailed in item 3.1.

3. Results

The responses collected in the quantitative phase revealed that the best-known pedagogical methods among professors were lectures given by the professor, discussion and debates, case studies, seminars, and readings, respectively. The most frequently adopted practices were lectures given by the professor, discussions and debates, case studies, reading of texts and seminars, as presented in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Most well-known and used teaching methods

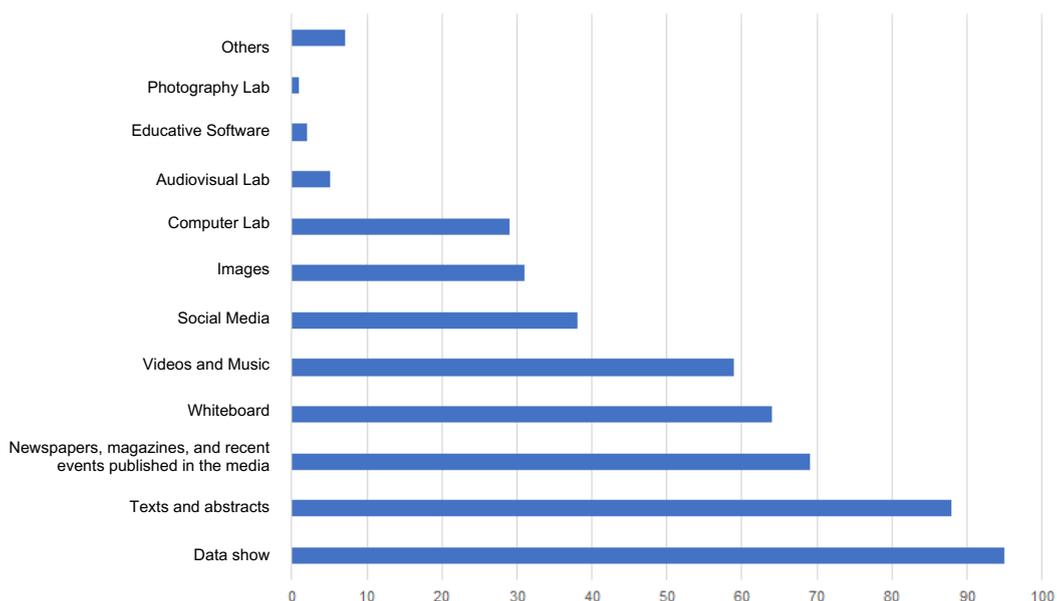


Source: Authors.

The responses indicate the predominance of "lectures given by the professor", which is explained by the following factors: economy of financial resources of the institution and the emphasis on the one-way transmission of content taught by the professor. The lecture-based teaching method is founded on the classic assumption that oral teaching is the best way to teach. However, one of the main criticisms of this method is the passivity of the student (Gil, 2013). A greater degree of participation is not required in the teaching-learning process and the student usually concentrates only on assimilation of knowledge, which reduces the stimulus of critical thinking needed for questioning and the construction of arguments.

Regarding technological supports of information and communication adopted in teaching methods, the *Data show* was named as the most used resource by 95% of the professors, as indicated in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Reaching resources used by professors



Source: Authors.

Less than a third of professors use social networks, images and a computer lab. Educational software stands out next, used by only 2% of the respondents. The fact that these resources are used by few professors may be related to insufficient funds for the acquisition of equipment and training for professors.

3.1. Pedagogical practices

In the second phase of the study, a qualitative approach was adopted to carefully analyze professors' pedagogical notions, including teaching-learning practices, technological tools selected for the classroom, and whether the HEIs where the professors worked were well equipped for the adoption of digital tools and platforms.

To present the results of this phase, we used the content analysis proposed by Bardin (2016), which follows the order of pre-analysis, exploration and interpretation of materials. Next, the transcribed content of the interviews was coded and then the context categories were defined under the premise of presence of terms mentioned by the professors, not necessarily the frequency with which the terms appeared in their responses.

Of the 22 interviewees, 16 were women and six were men. It was found that the fields of communications and mainly public relations have more female representation than male (Grunig, 2011). Fourteen of the 22 respondents had a doctoral degree and eight had a master's degree. In terms of years of experience as professors, five had less than 10 years of experience; ten had more than ten years, and seven had between 20 and 30 years of experience. To preserve the confidentiality of the respondents, the letter P was used to refer to the professors (P1 to P22).

When asked about the teaching-learning methods they had adopted, the respondents reported that they use a variety of methods in their subjects. Table 1 presents an organization of the methods freely cited by the different professors and the frequency with which they were cited, since one professor mentioned more than one method during the interview.

Table 1: Methods used by professors

PRACTICES	MENTIONS
Flipped classroom	9
Dramatization	8
Lectures	7
Games	7
Simulation	7
Conceptual maps	5
Technical visits	5
Debate groups	4
Digital platforms	4
Seminar	4
Reading	3
Situation-problem	3
Distance learning	2
Case studies	2
Movie viewing	1
Workshop	1

Source: Authors.

Some of the methods, including games, flipped classroom, technical visits, simulation and dramatization were cited in all regions of the country. According to Masetto and Zukowsky-Tavares (2015: 21, translation), professors' knowledge of methods can "facilitate and intensify student learning through varied techniques in face-to-face and virtual environments, as well as energize pedagogical action and allow the development of multiple facets of learning".

When questioned about their perception of student involvement based on the different pedagogical methods adopted, all of the respondents, except P14, stated that students had adopted an active and positive position towards learning with innovative practices. It is worth highlighting P9's statement about positive factors when he stated, "*I have noticed that, for the student, the class becomes more dynamic because I do not offer answers, but I ask questions. Because I think that the student becomes much more interested upon realizing that what he or she contributes is useful*".

Regarding why professors started to introduce technology in classes, it was pointed out that students felt more motivated, and that technology gained their attention (as confirmed by Peñalva, Aguaded and Torres-Toukourmidis (2019) in a study on gamification in university teaching). The motivational factor was highlighted as a lever for the introduction of technologies in the classroom in response to student interest. According to the interviewees, it is the students who ask the professor to introduce technologies in teaching.

Quintanilla (2017: 260, translation) clarifies that these differentiated practices allow students to act with "autonomy in the development of a project and in the creation of a product that, of course, contributes to the incorporation of new learning or the strengthening of what already exists".

One of the professors interviewed, P15, mentioned other positive aspects that result from the application of these methods, such as "*the student acquires a differentiated position. A priori, a certain degree of inhibition, but then more security in terms of his or her capacity, better positioning and greater participation*". Along the same lines, P3 stated that "*the student feels totally motivated. I realize that the dynamics change, the conventional classroom is no longer so biased. What I see is that a large number of students like it, the class improves, it is another construction. My assessment as a professor is better*". In contrast, P3 pointed out that the adoption of these practices can also create problems: "*I realize that certain students show resistance, because the traditional system in the classroom is ingrained*".

These statements align with Peñalva, Aguaded and Torres-Toukourmidis (2019: 254, translation), who reported:

Students also experience, at first, resistance to the use of active methodologies and the use of gamification in the classroom, because they have been in a rigid system for many years where they have assumed the role of listeners. In the end, students become involved in new learning systems and do not want to go back to traditional methods.

The experience of working with different teaching methods that motivate students in the classroom makes professors more likely to adopt these technologies in the learning process (Peñalva, Aguaded and Torres-Toukoumidis, 2019).

3.2. The use of technologies

According to Rosas Chávez (2017), over time, educational institutions have struggled to incorporate advancements in science, knowledge and technology; these adaptations to new environments are what, in turn, have determined new progress in these fields. Perhaps the greatest impact and usefulness that ICT innovation has had in education is the large amount of information that can be accessed through the internet, according to a study by Hilbert and López (2011).

More than 20 years ago, the first digital technologies were introduced in Brazilian HEIs to support the work of professors. Back then, many came to advocate for the professor’s disappearance. It has already been said that the use of technologies has allowed the professor to assume a new role in the current scenario: that of counselor. ICTs function as "amplifiers" of all the elements of education.

Although technologies have come to support personal and professional development, thus allowing individuals to reduce physical barriers and intensify communication flows, it must be recognized that their usage does not guarantee that the needs in the immediate environment and the demands of higher education will be met—yet, there is no turning back (Bermúdez-Rodríguez and Fueyo-Gutiérrez, 2018).

The interviews sought to determine to what extent professors of public relations programs subscribe to the use of digital platforms in their classes to transmit knowledge, experiences and to bring theory to practice.

It is also worth noting that, with the adoption of ICTs, public relations practices in organizations in Brazil have changed radically in recent years. Social networks have allowed a multiplication of dialogue and information channels with audiences, as well as the upsurge of new interaction and entertainment tools on digital platforms. This brings greater opportunities for public relations professionals to structure a more effective and balanced communication with different audiences.

In terms of findings, three of the professors stated they do not use digital media, and one did not answer the question. Instead, the majority of the respondents affirmed that they adopt different educational platforms or educational tools simultaneously. WhatsApp was the most cited medium, with a total of seven references. Table 2 presents the other tools used in the classroom mentioned by the professors during the interview, since more than one technology was cited by each of the interviewees.

Table 2: Technologies used by professors

TOOL	MENTIONS
WhatsApp	7
Facebook	6
Email	5
Research platforms	4
Moodle	4
Blackboard	3
Mobile	2
Blog, Google Drive, debate group, Kahoot, online material, PowerPoint, Sisgrade, evaluation site, YouTube	1 (each)

Source: Authors.

In a society where people are constantly connected, either through smartphones or through notebooks, it is important to know, especially in higher education environments, the right time to use these technologies to better manage platforms and strike a balance between entertainment and knowledge. As one respondent (P4) pointed out, *"I always seek to put myself in the other person's position and transfer these actions to organizations; think about what you will do tomorrow as a professional, what will your level of responsibility be, how can you disconnect from other topics, because there are things that are parallel and on a personal level. So I spend a lot of time reflecting on this, not only with regard to technology, but also more generally"*.

With this same perspective, P17 observed, *"I love technologies, I think they are extremely positive. A communication professional has no choice: he or she is obliged to work with these technologies. Otherwise, he or she will lose their spot to those who have put in the time to learn them. They may not know much*

about communication, and they may not know much about relationships, but they know how to work with software".

P11 admitted to only using research platforms, noting that, "I think they can help in certain situations. But I don't think we should feel compelled to use them. In certain situations, they are relevant and helpful, of course, but in others, they are not". Along the same lines, P1 stressed, "We use them at certain times when they become necessary for the subject. It won't be all the time, because we also live in a society where students use their mobile phone as if it were an extension of their own body. We also complain, because while we are clarifying something, the students have their mobile in their hand. But if the situation demands it, it is clear we use technology".

P8 underscored an important point by commenting, "I think it would be inconsistent for me to ban it. We study communication, which goes through technological interfaces, and that's why it wouldn't make sense", mainly in the present public relations context where one must be part of the digital universe to best understand an organization's audience.

Among the tools that provide learning opportunities mediated by technology, P13 mentioned the adoption of Kahoot (a learning platform based on games used in the classroom. For more details, see Rodríguez-Fernández, 2017) and comments, "it is very easy to use with questions that must be answered in a certain amount of time, like a test; if it is not answered, points are lost. But I have only used Kahoot a few times because it takes work; then there is the question of time. I wish I could use it more".

This comment corroborates the discussion undertaken by Peñalva, Aguaded and Torres-Toukoumidis (2019), who have pointed to the modest implementation of gamification in universities and the scarcity of studies in the field of communications, with the majority of research coming from departments of technology, engineering and architecture.

The most important objectives cited among the respondents regarding the use of technologies as mediating instruments in the teaching-learning process include strengthening relationships with students, encouraging them to be more active, creating opportunities to apply new knowledge to real-life situations, presenting new concepts and knowledge in multiple ways, and enabling learning through collaboration.

It is worth noting that new teaching methods, including those based on ICTs, involve creating a framework of competence to face the challenges of the century and promote lifelong education. This framework of competencies calls for a professional profile in which interpersonal skills, the ability to learn new languages and flexibility to act in the face of uncertainty play a fundamental role. According to Universia Perú (2013), the ability to manage time, active learning and judgment and decision-making are among the most high-priority skills since they will significantly increase labor productivity (Rosas Chávez, 2017).

These competencies are part of the set of attributes that companies, communication agencies and non-profit organizations seek in the hiring of public relations professionals in Brazil.

In one study, Ferrari (2017b) observed that, currently, communication executives seek to employ communicators who demonstrate professional ethical responsibility and the ability to plan and manage projects (corroborating a previous study on education in public relations conducted in the United States by DiStaso, Stacks and Botan, 2009). Both competencies take on special significance in a "post-truth" society, where the immediate and excessive transmission of information can jeopardize the stability and reputation of an organization.

3.3. Available infrastructure

The interviews revealed that the use of technologies in the classroom depends on a variety of factors, such as the professor's knowledge of the content, the context of the subject taught and its relationship with the other subjects in the semester, the context of the HEIs, and the available infrastructure. For this reason, it is important that the pedagogical understanding of the professor and the institution are coherent, so as to allow the adoption of different teaching-learning methods with their respective technological supports.

The research also analyzed classroom and laboratory infrastructure to determine if the existing infrastructure allowed the adoption of new pedagogical practices for student learning. Sixteen of the 22 respondents mentioned that their HEIs have adequate infrastructure for the adoption of different practices and use of digital tools or platforms.

A large portion of the 16 respondents belong to private HEIs, which, unlike public HEIs, privilege specific areas as a means of "attracting students". One of the respondents (P9) reported, "there are areas for computers, technological infrastructure, rooms for qualitative research, rooms with mirrors for simulation

and debate groups", which confirms that the institution has a variety of physical spaces to promote the development of its students.

Six of the respondents stated that their institution does not have proper infrastructure. Some HEIs do not have equipment due to lack of funds, as indicated by P8. Some institutions have equipment, but not the best of conditions for other reasons, as P5 reports: "*there is equipment, but physical space is limited*". P19 adds, "*the infrastructure of the institution is in poor condition, there are few computers for many students*". In summary, it is observed that, for many of the respondents, technologies are indispensable tools in the current scenario, either to allow a better quality teaching-learning process, or to prepare professionals for the workforce. It is essential that HEIs have a minimally appropriate structure and promote a culture that allows the adoption of new practices by professors.

4. Discussion

The results of the research suggest that the arrival of ICTs prompted a change in pedagogical approaches of professors of public relations programs in Brazil. Respondents refer to the proactive attitude of students when they develop innovative pedagogical practices, which makes learning more meaningful. In this sense, students become more participative and involved through training that emphasizes reflexive critical thinking and good citizenship, all in line with the challenges of the 21st century.

It must be noted that "[Generation Z] students access information – not always of good quality – very quickly and easily and have difficulty paying attention and concentrating on a single activity for long periods of time" (Quintanilha, 2017: 252, translation). This requires innovative teaching strategies from professors. The respondents' statements reveal that even those who consider themselves "analog" because they were not literate in the digital world are aware that it is necessary to rethink pedagogical practices to guarantee the attention of young people.

Quintanilha (2017) argues that teaching today's students is often considered one of the biggest challenges for educators who adopt traditional teaching methods. Adapting to new pedagogical practices is also one of the greatest difficulties of many educators, because it implies breaking many paradigms. In the specific case of public relations in Brazil, V. Rhoden and J. Rhoden (2017) affirm that there are professors in the field who have difficulties with digital environments and do not always master the new tools; in this sense, they must be trained for the new digital and virtual environment.

Aguerrondo has introduced the "teachability" concept for the analysis of professor training. According to the author:

the classic proposals for teacher training assume original conditions of teachability for future teachers that the processes of mass education have modified [...] neither initial training nor continuous training of teachers has incorporated alternative models of how to teach that can deconstruct the traditional image that has been learned (Aguerrondo, 2010: 3, translation).

This assertion suggests that the construction of the new teaching role implies a process of construction, deconstruction, reevaluation, and creation of sorts that resembles a vicious circle acting organically, thus taking into consideration the impact received from the environment and spreading its effects outward.

According to the professors interviewed, students perceive a tendency towards change in terms of the performance of their professors, their attempts to teach differently and communicate in other ways. The results indicate that almost all students recognize heterogeneity in their pedagogical relationships with their teachers, especially in regards to communication methods, not necessarily because of digital devices, but because of the digital context in which learning takes place. Ultimately, the aim of professors is to generate some type of change that favors the creating of a new education professional who seeks to apply innovative teaching strategies.

Morais and Almeida (2016) affirm that pedagogical practices must be related to different areas of knowledge, perspectives and tasks to ensure coherence between content and student interests. "Recognizing the value of essays and other forms of writing, portfolios, case studies, role-playing and other performances, posters and other public presentations are examples of how the opportunity for debate can be emphasized" (Morais; Almeida, 2016: 143, translation).

It is noteworthy that the data collected in the quantitative phase indicates that the teaching methods adopted by a large portion of the professors of public relations programs continue to reflect the traditional teaching model; that is, lectures, discussions, debates and seminars which can be excellent forms of teaching certain topics.

On the other hand, the qualitative phase showed a diversification of methods adopted in the classroom, which may have a connection to the context in which the professors find themselves. Methods such as the flipped classroom and dramatization were cited more frequently than lectures, at the same level of games and simulations, followed by concept maps and technical visits, all of which are practices that allow the student to establish connections with content, share experiences with colleagues and dare to create and innovate.

In terms of technological supports, the use of messaging and networking apps (WhatsApp and Facebook, respectively) were the most frequently mentioned by professors. In this case, an expansion of the initial use of these tools was observed for the classroom environment, which reveals promising possibilities for testing, discussion groups, news publishing, research, readings, or even maintaining conversations with students who have their attention fixated on social networks and their mobiles, as Rodríguez-Fernández (2017) points out.

In this case, professors must work on current topics of interest to the profession based on content from different subjects, thus seeking interdisciplinary work that avoids knowledge fragmentation and brings students closer to meeting the demands of the workplace. This can be done through the use of software that simulates the practice of management and definition of public relations strategies (A. Grohs and L. Grohs, 2019) or the use of films and series to analyze public opinions, attitudes and behaviors in the face of ethical dilemmas and the impact on organizations (Silva and Henriques, 2018). Likewise, according to the "From class to account" program, it is possible to stimulate the development of projects in collaboration with other educational or professional institutions. This places value on teamwork and providing experiences in intercultural environments through the mediation of digital platforms, thus demonstrating that there are no barriers to innovation in the teaching-learning process.

Regarding infrastructure (libraries, equipped classrooms, computers, etc.), many professors commented on the availability of resources. However, future studies would be necessary to determine if the qualification of professors and technicians influences the use of these tools. This is because, considering the great advances in technology, it is necessary to adapt to this constantly changing reality. The field of education is one of the most severely affected, and it must move forward and introduce emerging learning practices to get as close as possible to the realities experienced by students.

Thus, professors must overcome the "tendency to transmit 'fixed values' of information and invest in methods that equip students with the ability to formulate well-founded knowledge" (Lima, 1997: 3, translation). However, even if students are the protagonists of their learning, the professor will continue to act as a motivating agent so that students can discover links between concepts and, therefore, build new schemes and knowledge.

Entry into the environment of digital technologies brings consequences to the learning process that "has become increasingly distanced from the environment known by many professors in their training and experience. Specific competencies are required to face these changes" (Prata-Linhares, Pimenta and Gonçalves, 2017: 619, translation).

Therefore, it is essential that HEIs and professors are aware that the profile of the student has changed over the years and, therefore, it is necessary to adapt to new media and contexts. The current challenge for professors is to awaken in students the motivation to acquire new knowledge throughout life, based on the perspective of continuing education that promotes personal and professional development, which is essential in public relations.

This vision is one of the findings of the study, which reveals that the adoption of active methods and digital tools by professors facilitates student learning. Interviews revealed that students happen to play a more active role, breaking down the stigma of being a mere receiver of content. Thus, it is essential that the professor consider the ecology of digital learning. This presupposes a hybrid education that weaves in face-to-face education that fosters emotions and interpersonal relationships with technological platforms to support students in the search for autonomy and respect for personal interests.

5. Conclusions

Research shows that, in recent years, there has been a relative advancement in terms of digital technology that has impacted teaching-learning methodologies in all areas of knowledge. In the specific case of public relations programs in Brazil, the study revealed that professors are adapting their in-class methodologies and practices in response to the "digital" students of the 21st century, who find support in technology to achieve knowledge.

The findings of the study conducted between 2016 and 2018 demonstrate that public relations programs have been renewing and updating their teaching-learning methods to keep up with daily advances in the workplace. Therefore, young communicators recently graduated from HEIs need competencies that meet business and technology demands. Within organizations, these competencies make it possible for appropriate learning outcomes to be applied in a work context. Rather than being limited to cognitive elements, these competencies also involve functional aspects including technical, interpersonal and attitudinal skills, such as positioning in the face of ethical dilemmas.

The professional practice of public relations is based on managing relationships. This premise should serve as a starting point for innovative teaching-learning processes such as the inclusion of dramatizations and/or role plays that simulate problems of everyday life, management of social networks created with the purpose of facing challenges in times of crisis, the creation of necessary digital channels for the promotion of events coordinated by students.

These recommendations promote the integration of theory and practice and can be expanded by promoting interdisciplinary projects mediated with the use of technologies, depending on the content, situations and learning objectives to be achieved, in accordance with the vocation of the pedagogical project of the course of each HEI.

There is consensus on the determining role that students play in the learning process as protagonists of their own story through different learning experiences facilitated by the professors with whom they interact. For this reason, valuing student autonomy, the development of their skills and their training processes are principles that should guide HEIs in the new century. This aforementioned role is essential in the day to day activities of communications professionals, since they will face power conflicts and ethical dilemmas that will demand their "academic knowledge" and analytical capacity to make appropriate decisions for both for society and the organization.

The approach that places the individual as the builder of his or her own story and that places the professor as mediator of the teaching-learning process requires a cultural change in traditional pedagogical thinking. This change must be supported by teacher training that is consistent with reality. Among the most important findings is the incorporation of ICTs as an educational support that depends on a contemporary pedagogical notion aligned with institutional values.

The recent mobilization of Brazilian HEIs in the pedagogical redevelopment of public relations programs, based on mandatory curricular guidelines that require greater coordination between theory, practice and technology management, may have instigated other forms of teaching. It is true that the effects of the implementation may take time to show, since most are in the process of adaptation. It is imperative that there be new research to continue identifying teaching practices and pedagogical notion adopted in public relations programs in the country.

Finally, the results obtained from the present study offer an opportunity for new studies to be developed, mainly to assess the impact of technology on the learning process of students in the digital age, which poses a challenge for professors, HEIs and the public relations profession. In addition, it demonstrates the efforts of academia to cross over to the working world to equip communications professionals with techniques, strategies, and training so they become citizens concerned about the quality of life of society and not only the economic interests of organizations.

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Appendix: Public Relations Programs in Brazil

IES	CATEGORY	URL
West Central		
Faculdade Sul-Americana*	Private	www.fasam.edu.br
Universidade Federal de Goiás*	Public	www.ufg.br
North East		
Universidade Federal de Alagoas*	Public	www.ufal.br
Unijorge	Private	www.unijorge.edu.br
Universidade Católica de Salvador	Private	www.ucsal.br
Universidade do Estado da Bahia*	Public	www.uneb.br
Universidade Salvador*	Private	www.unifacs.br
Universidade Federal do Maranhão*	Public	www.ufma.br
Universidade Federal da Paraíba*	Public	www.ufpb.br
North		
Centro Universitário de Ensino Superior do Amazonas	Private	www.ciesa.br
Universidade Federal do Amazonas*	Public	www.ufam.edu.br
South East		
Centro Universitário Una*	Private	www.una.br
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Minas Gerais*	Private	www.pucminas.br
Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais*	Public	www.ufmg.br
Faculdades Integradas Hélio Alonso*	Private	www.facha.edu.br
Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro*	Public	www.uerj.br
Centro Universitário Belas Artes de São Paulo*	Private	www.belasartes.br
Centro Universitário Fam	Private	www.vemprafam.com.br
Centro Universitário Fiam-Faam	Private	www.fiamfaam.br
Centro Universitário Sant'Anna*	Private	www.unisantanna.br
Faculdade Americana	Private	www.fam.br

Faculdade Cásper Líbero*	Private	www.casperlibero.edu.br
Faculdade Esamc Santos	Private	www.esamc.br
Faculdade Integrada Metropolitana de Campinas*	Private	www.metrocamp.edu.br
Faculdade Paulista de Comunicação*	Private	www.fpac.com.br
Faculdade Paulus de Tecnologia e Comunicação*	Private	www.fapcom.edu.br
Faculdade São Judas Tadeu	Private	www.usjt.br
Faculdades Integradas Rio Branco*	Private	www.riobrancofac.edu.br
Fundação Armando Álvares Penteado*	Private	www.fAAP.br
Fundação Escola de Comércio Álvares Penteado*	Private	www.fecap.br
Pontifícia Universidade Católica de Campinas*	Private	www.puc-campinas.edu.br
Universidade Anhembi Morumbi*	Private	www.anhembi.br
Universidade Católica de Santos*	Private	www.unisantos.br
Universidade de São Paulo*	Public	www.usp.br
Universidade de Sorocaba*	Private	www.uniso.br
Universidade de Taubaté*	Public	www.unitau.br
Universidade Estadual Paulista*	Public	www.unesp.br
Universidade Metodista de São Paulo*	Private	www.metodista.br
South		
Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Paraná*	Private	www.pucpr.br
Universidade Estadual de Londrina*	Public	www.uel.br
Universidade Federal do Paraná*	Public	www.ufpr.br
Centro Universitário da Serra Gaúcha	Private	www.fsg.edu.br
Centro Universitário Ritter dos Reis*	Private	www.uniritter.edu.br
Faculdades Integradas de Taquara*	Private	www.faccat.br
Pontifícia Universidade Católica do Rio Grande do Sul*	Private	www.pucrs.br
Universidade de Caxias do Sul*	Private	www.ucs.br
Universidade de Santa Cruz do Sul	Private	www.unisc.br
Universidade do Vale do Rio dos Sinos*	Private	www.unisinos.br
Universidade Federal de Santa Maria*	Public	www.ufsm.br
Universidade Federal do Pampa*	Public	www.unipampa.edu.br
Universidade Federal do Rio Grande do Sul*	Public	www.ufrgs.br
Universidade Feevale*	Private	www.feevale.br
Universidade do Vale do Itajaí*	Private	www.univali.br

*HEIs where there were professors who participated in the study. In the quantitative phase there was also participation from professors of other institutions which, after 2018, did not offer public relations as a program. These institutions were: Faculdade Sul Americana (West central), Universidade Católica de Pernambuco (North east), Centro Universitário Newton Paiva, Centro Universitário Nossa Senhora do Patrocínio, Faculdades Atibaia, União das Faculdades dos Grandes Lagos, Universidade Cruzeiro do Sul, Universidade de Santo Amaro, Universidade Sagrado Coração (South east), Faculdade América Latina, Centro Universitário Autônomo do Brasil, Universidade Luterana do Brasil, Universidade Regional do Noroeste do Estado do Rio Grande do Sul (South).

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