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## MEANINGFUL “LIKES”: HOW TO DIGITALLY COMMUNICATE THE ETHICS BEHIND A YOGHURT

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*Míriam Díez Bosch, Alba Sabaté Gauxachs  
and Josep Lluís Micó Sanz*

**Abstract:** For almost forty years the La Fageda cooperative has been working to improve the lives of people with intellectual disabilities and severe mental illnesses in the district of La Garrotxa (Catalonia), while producing one of the best-selling yoghurts in the region (Casadesús-Masanell, Ricart and Mitchell, 2011). The model of its social project puts people at the centre and has been developed on the basis of the principles and anthropological foundations of its founder, Cristóbal Colón (Ribera, 2006). The goal of this research paper is to analyse how the entire social project and the principles behind the yoghurts, jams and ice creams produced by La Fageda are communicated digitally. With this objective in mind, the profiles of the cooperative on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube are analysed, with the addition of in-depth interviews with the founder and with the communications team, as well as with a focus group formed by employees from the company’s various departments. Taken as a whole, this study makes it possible to indicate how the principles, working practice and leadership of La Fageda, with every feature that makes it unique and original, have a coherent presence on social media, and how similar dynamics might be attained both off-line and in the digital realm.

**Keywords:** ethical leadership, La Fageda, social media, communication, digital communication, social organisation

## INTRODUCTION

“The meaning of work is work with meaning”, and “we have to look at peoples’ abilities, not at their disabilities”. These are the slogans of the La Fageda cooperative. On the basis of these foundational concepts, nearly four decades ago its founder, Cristóbal Colón, sought a way to use work to improve the quality of people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses in the region of La Garrotxa. With Plato, Marx and Freud as the basis of his thought, Colón chose to follow the footsteps of the Italian psychiatrist Franco Basaglia, focused on transforming psychiatric hospitals, seen as infrastructures that did not help their inmates to get better, offering no activities of a therapeutic character. In this way, he decided to choose fourteen people from the psychiatric hospital in the Catalan town of Salt and, convinced that they could be better if they were helped by being given a job, he went to the city council of Olot, the capital of the La Garrotxa region. “I am Cristóbal Colón, I have come here with 14 patients from the psychiatric hospital of Salt and we would like to set up a company.” What began with an agreement with the district capital to do gardening work in municipal green space, has ended up as one of the best-selling yoghurt brands in Catalonia, providing work to people with intellectual disabilities and mental illnesses in the region. La Fageda, rather than working as a corporation, is a social project.

People at the core, integrity, trust, responsibility, optimism, effort and quality—these are the principles the project is grounded upon, according to what has been defined as its corporate identity. The goal of this study is to analyse the presence of these principles in the digital communication carried out by the cooperative, and more specifically in the social media platforms administered under the auspices of La Fageda.

This study examines how this strategy, its principles and its overall history are present on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. Earlier studies have been carried out analysing the values of La Fageda, although none of them have focused on the promotion and effort to create greater awareness about La Fageda, nor how its ethics are taught publicly. No study has been made, furthermore, of the reputation of La Fageda on the basis of its presence on social media.

What motivates the La Fageda employees? Do they share the principles of the cooperative on social media? What is the role of the founder in promoting a greater understanding of the ethical values the enterprise is run by? These are a few of the questions that the study seeks to address by means of interviews, participant observation, focus groups and the tracking of social media, analysing and presenting a model for “best practices”.

*Ètica dins d'un iogurt* [Ethics in a Yoghurt] is the name of the project this article has been derived from. It takes as its case study the role of what we will call “caring leadership”, expressing the ethical values of the organisation. The idea is to promote this concept as a model to stimulate research of ethical subject matter as applied to organisations, from the perspective of digital communication.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical framework of this study is derived from sources that have studied ethical leadership and corporate communication, with a special interest in socially-motivated organisations and those who offer social services. Those researchers who have reflected on the use of social media are also part of this theoretical foundation.

### ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

According to Eubanks, Brown and Ybema (2012), the study of ethical leadership goes back to the 1990s. The reason for including ethics in studies on leadership is that organisations come to realise that it is necessary that their leaders, through their ethical decisions and actions, become examples of integrity for all their related interest groups and stakeholders (Brito, 2016). McCann and Holt (2013) state that the cause could also be the corruption scandals affecting certain organisations that were made public in the 1970s. Steinbauer, Renn, Taylor and Njoroge (2014) have also studied the origins of research into ethical leadership. In 1999, Bass and Steidlmeier had already sought to trace the link between ethics and the act of leadership. Authors such as Cortina (2017), Escobar Valenzuela (2000) and González Álvarez (1998), had analysed corporate ethics in more general terms.

The concept of leadership, for its part, has more than 350 different uses, according to Bass (2008). Authors such as Yukl and Mahsud (2010) justify this fact by arguing that the concept has been transferred directly from the common to the technical vocabulary. Bass (2008) is precisely one of those who study this variety of definitions, carrying out a revision of studies on leadership ranging from ancient Egypt to the beginning of the 21st century. He defines leadership as an interaction between members of a group, involving the structuring or restructuring of situations, the perceptions and the expectations of its members. For Bass (2008), leadership takes place when a member of the group modifies the motivation or competences of others or when their attention is directed towards goals or to the path required to accomplish them. House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta (2004) define leadership as the ability to motivate, influence and awaken possibilities for individuals in the fulfilment of their organisational objectives.

#### ORGANISATIONAL ETHICAL LEADERSHIP

Kotter (1998) establishes the difference between leadership and administration. For this author, administration seeks to work in complexity, giving order and consistency to key dimensions. On the other hand, leadership seeks to manage change by setting up a vision of the future and aligning people towards the fulfilment of this vision, keeping them motivated and inspired. For Correa, Rodríguez and Pantoja (2018), leadership is based on a process of reciprocal influence between a member of a group recognised as a leader and the rest of its members. Through this influence, the intention is to align and motivate group behaviour, with the goal of establishing a set of objectives and acting in a way to attain them, as a way of administering the inevitable changes that all organisations must undergo.

According to Davis and Newstrom (1999), leadership is a catalyser that transforms an organisation's potential into reality. As Correa, Rodríguez and Pantoja (2018) see it, this process happens because of the support, motivation and inspiration taking place both in setting out objectives and in meeting them.

Burnes and By (2012) analyse effective leadership, and speak of effective leaders as those who are able to adapt their style of direction to the context they are working in. Correa, Rodríguez and Pantoja (2018)

highlight two fundamental facets where a leader needs to be effective: the ethics of what is being done, or the motive and ends of one's actions; and the ethics of how the leader carries out tasks, or the process of leadership and all interactions with those following the leader.

Correa, Rodríguez and Alonso (2018) point out at four tendencies in research on ethical leadership, as detected by Lussier and Achua (2005), as follows: studies on aspects of leadership; group questions; aspects related to organisational culture, and aspects that go beyond the limits of the organisation, such as national and transnational cultures and external stakeholders.

Yukl and Mahsud (2010) propose a conception of ethical leadership as a construct that is focused on ethical analysis: the personal characteristics of the leader (personal values, degree of moral development, and type of influence used); and the way decisions are made and acted upon, which would involve goals, means and results related to others. Lee (2009) focuses on virtual ethical leadership.

Lawton and Páez (2014) also centre on personal aspects of the ethical leader (virtues, intentions and practices), while Treviño, Hartman and Brown (2000) come to analyse the differences between the moral characteristics of a leader (features of the moral person) and his or her actions and decision-making (features of moral administration). Doyle and Smith (2001) seek to determine which characteristics of a leader distinguish him or her as ethical. Following Treviño, Brown and Hartman (2003), Brown and Treviño (2006) and De Hoog and Den Hartog (2008), these characteristics would be integrity, honesty and reliability.

Treviño, Brown and Hartman (2003), as well as Schein (2004), speak of the features that characterise ethical leadership. Bass and Steidlmeier (1999) deal with the styles of such leadership. Wu (2004) analyses the so-called catalytic mechanics, which are understood as the strategies by which the organisational ethics are implemented. Dickinson, Smith, Grojean and Ehrhart (2001) take on contextual aspects of ethical leadership. Studies of the relationship between national cultures and ethical leadership have been carried out by Resick, Hanges, Dickson and Mitchelson (2006), as well as Maak and Pless (2009). Voegtlin (2011) speaks of responsible leadership and proposes it as the interaction between ethical leadership and CSR.

Researchers studying the results of ethical leadership include Covey (1990), Bouckennooghe, Zafar and Raja (2014), and Tu, Lu and Yu (2016), who for their part examine positive effects more specifically. Max Weber

(1947), Westwood and Chan (1992), Redding, Norman and Schlander (1994), and Pellegrini and Scandura (2008) have analysed leadership from the perspective of paternalism. For their part, Chan, McBey and Scott-Ladd (2011) deal with what are known as the Rules of St. Benedict, a set of conventions dealing with the integration of religious principles in working life. In turn, Guibert (2017) has spoken of Ignatian leadership, in reference to the exercise of reviving institutions related to the life and work of Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and its application to leadership, focusing on how people should be accompanied on the path towards the fulfilment of a given mission.

Moving beyond ethical leadership, Sanders (2017) focuses on spiritual leadership from his experience of more than four decades, based on biblical principles. Vu and Gill (2018) have done something similar from the perspective of Buddhism. Fry (2003) and Hicks (2002) have done research on working spaces, while Wagner (2018) has dealt with female spiritual leadership in university institutions.

#### ETHICAL LEADERSHIP DIGITAL COMMUNICATION

In the area of communication, Mateos (1998) studied the function of communication in organisations that offer social services. Manuti (2016), and Bingham and Conner (2010) analyse communication of socially-motivated organisations from the perspective of social media. Barrionuevo Almuzara, Estupinyà Pinyol and Martín Marichal (2014) have set out a manual of best practices for each kind of social media. McCorkindale (2010) studies Twitter uses and Sheldon and Bryant (2016), the Instagram ones. González Álvarez (2010) analyses how the professionalisation of communication in social organisations has served to advance awareness of society in relation to them. Bennett (1998), deals with advertising in the third sector, from the point of view of awareness, influence and socially responsible communication.

Macnamara and Zerfass (2012), Leonardi and Treem (2012) and Reitz (2012) have studied this question from the perspective of organisations in general. Other researchers working in this field, like Lipsman, Graham, Rich, and Bruich (2012), reflect upon the influence and power of social media, studying ways of measuring the value of followers. Petry (2018), McLeod (2015), Sheninger (2014) work on the aspects of digital leadership; Atkins (2018), Rosenthal and Mckeown (2017), Shen,

Kuo and Ly (2017) or Uzunlu (2014) on digital influencers in social media and their branding work. Khang, Ki and Ye (2012) focus on research on social media in the fields of communication, marketing and public relations. From the specific perspective of marketing, referential authors such as Kotler, Saliba and Wrenn (1991) have further distinguished the communication strategy being followed in the organisation under analysis.

## METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this study was drawn from various research techniques, indicated as follows: participant observation (with various stages spent at the cooperative); in depth interviews; the creation of a focus group (Busquet, Medina and Sort, 2006); and netnography (Kozinets, 2010), that is, the analysis of the web behaviour of the cooperative on the basis of the activity of its profiles on social media.

In-depth interviews (Johnson, 2002) were carried out with the communication team and with the cooperative's founder. More specifically, those interviewed were Albert Riera (Communications Director), Esther Carreras (Marketing Director) and project founder Cristóbal Colón. Simultaneously, an interview was done with Suzy Schultz, an American expert in communication in social organisations. The questionnaires employed featured an opening list of common questions, followed by a section with more personalised questions. All interviews were carried out in person and individually and were recorded.

The netnography, or digital tracking, covered a period of three months, running from 16 October 2017 to 15 January 2018. In analysing this material, a formula was prepared (see Annex 1). On the one hand, it included the main features that make it possible to identify interaction on social media; on the other, it focused on the identifying features of La Fageda, with the objective of measuring its online presence.

In this way, at first the format of online posts was analysed. Statistical data were gathered on the images used as well as on infographics, emojis, mentions, hashtags and links. The language used was also considered. All told, the goal of the second part of the form, dealing with received interaction, was to see how this format is received by users. In this latter section, data were gathered on how many likes, commentaries, shares and video reproductions were generated for all posts made.

Later, the form includes a section on the principles of La Fageda. In this section there is a measure of how many posts these principles appear in, and which specific values can be found in each. Along with the values of people at the core, integrity, trust, responsibility, optimism, effort and quality (the principles in question), another space was added for marketing, where data were gathered on those posts meant to explicitly and solely promote La Fageda products.

Finally, the analytical form includes four key features that make up the identity of the La Fageda cooperative: its leader, people, nature, and its products. In this way, the research team studied how many times each of these features appeared in online posts.

The social media studied were Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube—that is, all of those where the La Fageda cooperative has an active account. A total of 263 posts made in the period were studied, of which: 72 on Facebook, 48 on Instagram, 90 on Twitter, 35 on LinkedIn and 18 on YouTube.

The third technique used, that as the interview was applied in person, was the creation of a focus group. Eight people participated from different departments and sections of the cooperative, all of whom intervene in the various production phases of La Fageda products; the focus group also looked at various moments in the employees' lives. The selection of the focus group included individuals with responsibilities in communication and attention to the public, as well as therapists, psychologists, administrative staff, factory employees and those coordinating school visits.

The fourth technique carried out involved non-participant observation. The research team visited the cooperative facilities on various occasions and had an opportunity to carefully view some of the tasks carried out in different departments. These moments made it possible to round out understanding of the dynamics and business culture of the facility. It was possible to see how the scenes described in the interviews and the focus groups are authentic, for example, with the cooperative's kitchen employees, the administration staff, those in charge of ensuring that the lids of the products are properly placed, with the care taken of animals, as well as the creation and development of a new garden area created within the facilities. During this observation process, researchers were able to witness human relationships at La Fageda, both between employees and with the founder, Cristóbal Colón. In total, therefore, there were four sessions dedicated to this technique of observation during a visit.

Along with the authors cited in the theoretical framework section, the review of existing literature provided two case studies, carried out respectively by the IESE Business School and the Harvard Business School, complementing literature from national and international media outlets that have dealt with the initiative since it was founded. A few videos featuring historical interviews with the founder were useful in documenting the person and what was specifically carried out for this project.

As part of the study, the research team was supported by consultation with the Applied Ethics Centre at Deusto University, in Bilbao. This centre was also able to do non-participant observation during a visit to the cooperative's facilities. With their visit and a second interview carried out with the communication team and the founder, researchers Igor Goitia and Cecilia Rodríguez, specialised in the ethics of organisations, were able to corroborate that La Fageda satisfies the conditions of social enterprises. They recognised its distinguishing characteristics, including the will to grow internally and its consolidated relationship with the immediate environment. Besides this, the process, the methodology and the first results were shared and debated in the following events:

- Workshop on ethical leadership, given by the research team at the Pontificia Università Gregoriana in Rome, in April 2018, as part of the leadership program of the Faculty of Social Sciences, with international students.
- Debate on the case of La Fageda at a session of the 2018 congress of the European Academy of Religion, in Bologna.
- Presentation at Bilbao's Deusto University with experts from the Centre for Applied Ethics, in May 2018, featuring feedback in Social Accountability from Deusto University.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The development of the methodology discussed has made it possible to respond to the objectives and queries set out at the beginning of this study. In this way, it has been possible to analyse how in social media and in the strategy and planning leading to their use, two key aspects of La Fageda are reflected: its principles and their reality and practice as expressed inside the company; and the integration of said principles and reality on

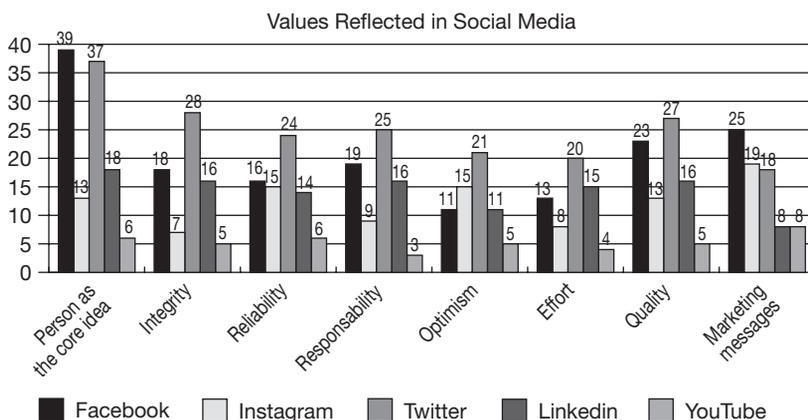


Figure 1. Presence of the La Fageda principles in social media (2017).

the basis of the foundational principles laid by the cooperative founder, Cristóbal Colón.

People at the core, integrity, trust, responsibility, optimism, effort and quality—Cristóbal Colón prefers to not speak of values. For the founder of La Fageda, these are the principles of the cooperative. Francesc Torralba (2018) defines principles as what is established as a starting point, the basis for something unquestionable. For Torralba (2018) they are different from values, since a principle is what upholds the edifice, and all argumentation must be made with principles. Torralba (2018), citing Plato—considered a point of reference by Colón—, comments that these principles have to be brief, clear and unanimously shared.

This is the case of the principles that arise out of La Fageda. There are few of them, they are clear, and in this study, we have been able to confirm that they are unanimously shared. In social media where the cooperative has a presence, all digital communication done in relation to them is transparent and balanced. This can be seen in the following chart:

In Figure 1 we can see how in social media, principles such as quality and people at the core appear with greater frequency. Torralba (2018) further emphasises that the debate on principles is found precisely in what they are, and which principles are most relevant. When Cristóbal Colón defines La Fageda, he affirms that it is a social project whose objective is the improvement of the lives of people with intellectual disabilities or severe mental illnesses, working together on a high-quality product, which is for that reason fully competitive on the market. People and quality are

the priorities, establishing the balance that was prioritised and sought after. In all the social media analysed these are the principles with which a majority of posts studied have been related to.

## BALANCE, AN INHERENT PRINCIPLE

It is neither announced nor mentioned in any explicit manner, but the concept of balance is found to be a key factor in many aspects related to the cooperative. It has also proven to be a basic foundation of the working success of the project, and one of the main competences set out under the concept of leadership (Fisher, 2004). At La Fageda, balance is found in various forms:

- **Balanced objectives:** The two sides of the organisation, therapeutic and business-related, fulfil their objectives to the maximum degree, both in social terms and in production. People are very important, so that the foundation of the strategy is to generate benefits from the sale of production, to be reinvested in the social project. In social media, the project appears together with the product sold. According to Cristóbal Colón, “We improve the life of people while making the best yoghurt in the world.”
- **Balanced messages:** The principles appear in posts in a way that is proportional and balanced (See Figure 1). Beyond the two priority principles mentioned, the rest (integrity, reliability, responsibility, optimism, effort and quality) appear with a similar frequency. Op-

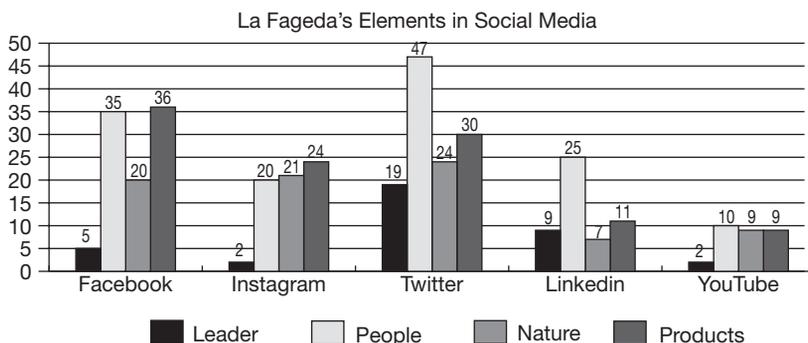


Figure 2. Presence of the La Fageda identifying features in social media (2017).

- timism stands out slightly, along with trust, integrity and responsibility, over effort and reliability. The character of the cooperative emerges anew with this affirmation, since the founder, in the interview, and the employees in the focus group created, also speak of optimism and the trust that has been placed on them. They are also very aware of the responsibility they have while prioritizing the integrity promoted through the cooperative. Effort and reliability are read between the lines in their declarations, and there does not seem to be a strong pressure to speak of the great effort their work represents, since optimism surpasses it; as for reliability, it is taken as an automatic result of all the rest. According to Eisenbeiss van Knippenberg and Fahrback (2014), the congruence of values strengthens the organisational climate and culture, which evolves towards the fulfilment of the mission and the organisational vision.
- Balance in relationships: “When you hear of the amount of yoghurts being sold you feel part of the effort as well, and that is an added value,” explains one of the employees in the focus group. Despite the clear leadership role of the founder, the cooperative has a horizontal structure (Martínez and Cegarra, 2014). People working at La Fageda feel they are part of a project, and members of a community, precisely due to the treatment and relationship with the leader and amongst themselves. Together they affirm that they have a feeling of being part of something where everyone is involved, and all departments feel they are on an equal footing. During the process of the focus group, the participants emphasised that their working environment affords them “personal and professional growth, many bonds are forged, there is a close relationship.” According to Cardona and Rey (2012), this sentiment is related to the integration of the principles of the organisation, and does not instantaneously appear in association with a person involved in it:

The first step of the process is the personal commitment of the leader, an act of will, which repeated over and over again, ends up becoming a habit. It is important to understand that the commitment we are referring to is not something that happens spontaneously, but rather forged over time. This is because to commit oneself to a mission or vision, it is not enough to “know it”, it has to be interiorised. That is, it has to be incorporated into one’s belief and personal value system.

Cardona and Rey (2012)

According to the employees, “to be motivated, you have to see you are growing, and La Fageda is growing constantly.” For this reason, they consider the project to be much more than a job, and state that “you feel it is part of you, you are La Fageda.” This demonstrates the direct relationship between the project and the identity of the people taking part in it. Certain reciprocity can be perceived. La Fageda would not have the same identity if it were not for the people that make it up, while they consider that the project is part of their own personal identity.

- **Balance in development:** This is directly related to the desire to grow internally and in a proportional manner. According to the founder, large quantities do not make up part of the organisation’s ambition, which is conceived to only grow internally. Cristóbal Colón (2018) himself has stated that in case of uncontrolled growth “the law of gravity would come into play”, and the relational bonds thriving in La Fageda would be weakened, a fundamental aspect of the way people employed at the cooperative relate to each other. All expansion would thus have to be internal. Esther Carreras (2018) explains that this is done by diversifying the production so as to take in more people from the region. For this reason, there is no plan to widen the area of distribution, limited to Catalonia and a few places in the Balearic Islands and Andorra; nor are there plans to expand production facilities. Carreras (2018) affirms that one of the commitments all employees of La Fageda have made is to never allow the cooperative to leave the region where it is now based, which is a fundamental piece of the project’s identity. This commitment is official and was set out in one of the seminars held at the cooperative, known as La Fageda 2020, to deal with future challenges. It is very important to identify the distinguishing features of the organisation to aid in its consolidation, as well as for its external image (Duque Oliva and Carvajal Prieto, 2015). In this case, its context and the awareness of its capacity are perceived as an identifying groundwork that ensures that the project will continue and develop in the same way it has until now.
- **Balance of perception:** This is fully reflected in the communication strategy of the project. As stated by Cristóbal Colón (2018), as well as by Albert Riera (2018) and Esther Carreras (2018), this will never be a question of social marketing. The project behind the product, which is foundational, is only explained in guided

visits that are offered in the cooperative's facilities, making it possible to offer visitors a more holistic vision. Esther Carreras (2018) explains that the project is founded on a "word-of-mouth strategy". In the words of project founder Cristóbal Colón (2018), "we never explain anywhere that we are a special work centre, and many people do not even realise this. People coming to visit us may or may not know this, but the goal is that they end up being totally assimilated into what the project is doing; we want people to feel part of the family community of La Fageda". Brenkert (2002) analyses the challenges of social marketing, which is precisely what Colón rejects. The degree of proximity and nearness sought with users is seen in the texts used in their digital posts themselves. The form of communication is also horizontal, dealing with consumers face to face. In fact, and especially on Facebook (with 19 posts) and Twitter (16 posts), emojis are used as a way of making the discourse less formal and bringing the organisation closer to the users (Danesi, 2016).

## PEOPLE AT THE CORE

Rodríguez and Aguilera (2005) offer details on how the type of organisation depends on the idea of people it holds. According to these authors, without an anthropological vision it is impossible to get a closer idea of how people work in organisations and what the institutional goals are. In this regard, La Fageda is founded on the anthropological vision of Cristóbal Colón, and its development is based on it. The organisation is explained from the perspective of people and organised on the basis of this perspective (Rodríguez and Aguilera, 2005). The employees in the focus group explain that at La Fageda "the starting point is the principle that all people have dignity. Integrity and the ethical behaviour of people are two very important factors here."

"La Fageda is a job, but in the end, our goal is for employees to be happy, that they may feel satisfied and see that they are improving their skills," they add. One of the heads of a production line points out that "the objective is to adapt the job to the person, according to his or her capacities." Thus, people are the basis and centre of the organisation, unlike some enterprises with similar production levels, which still work with a pyramidal structure (Argyris, 2017). In this case, the question goes

even further, since the main objective of the organisation is not “to get rich,” as the employees say, but to ensure the happiness of the employees of the company.

For this reason, flexibility is another of the inherent principles of La Fageda, where two million yoghurts are produced each week. “Our employees even do painting courses or have a go in our gardening section,” explains Carreras (2018), referring to the adaptation of each necessary task to the person able to carry it out.

For the employees in the focus group, La Fageda gives them much more than a salary, “as what you receive is priceless.” In this regard, the employees emphasise personal bonds, awareness of the project and knowledge that above all the project is based on solidarity. They affirm that “here you have a degree of gratification that you would not have in other companies.” According to Terán (2017), the emotional salary is becoming the main motivating factor for workers, as it allows them to work more comfortably, avoiding stress and raising their productivity at work.

## A CARING LEADERSHIP

Research shows that accompaniment is the concept that best describes Cristóbal Colón’s leadership role in La Fageda. This leadership is horizontal (Martínez and Cegarra, 2014), fits in well with the definition of ethical leadership set out by Bass (2008), as well as what is found in House, Hanges, Javidan, Dorfman and Gupta (2004). In any case, an aspect of Cristóbal Colón’s leadership is focused on, which makes it uniquely original. For the above mentioned authors, leadership means having an influence, it is about modifying the attitude of the group so as to focus it towards a common objective. From the way this is grounded in concepts of spiritual leadership, the basis is to reach a common objective. The role of Colón does not influence, nor does it help directly; rather, it empowers and accompanies others (Guibert, 2017), found as it is half-way between ethical leadership and spiritual leadership: it is leadership that accompanies (or *caring leadership*).

According to Brown and Treviño (2006) and De Hoog and Den Hartog (2008), these characteristics of a leader are integrity, honesty and reliability. They are qualities that can not only be associated with the founder of La Fageda, as seen in the interview, but are quite explicitly

related to the organisation's principle. In this regard, we once again see the coherence with which the groundwork of this project was laid.

The leadership that is put into practice is directly incarnated by the person of the founder. "Cristóbal should be eternal," was the statement heard from various members of the focus group. All members agreed that he exuded a sense of trust, "knowing everyone in the company, and in critical life moments he would be there to shake things up," they explain. According to these sources, the differentiating factor is his charisma, which helps him to express what he believes and what his objectives are.

According to Cristóbal Colón (2018), however, his goal is to not fall back into paternalist mentalities. Max Weber (1947) explained that practices derived from this concept are obsolete in organisations, while defining paternalism as one of the most fundamental expressions of dominance. In spite of this, some authors like Westwood and Chan (1992), or Redding, Norman and Schlander (1994) claim that leadership with a bit of paternalism is helpful, as it protects, accompanies and offers consideration. The vision the members of La Fageda have of the founder of the project is somewhat linked to that of the *pater familias*. In fact, it is a cohesive community, bound together by strong links and bonds of an almost familial nature (and indeed, in some cases members of the same family work there). Cristóbal Colón is the ground for these ties, and his highest goal at this time is to depersonalise his own leadership while looking for a future heir. People want leaders who are trustworthy, positive and honest (Correa, Rodríguez and Alonso, 2018), and this is seen in the case analysed in this research project. All things said and done, the challenge for the organisation is to find a new body of leadership to give the project continuity.

## SLOW SOCIAL MEDIA

Analysis of the social media of the cooperative makes it possible to see the pace, character and ends of the digital communication employed currently. We have been able to see that in a digital environment characterised by speed, La Fageda has a strategy of social media a la carte, related to the organisational and personal characteristics detected. For Susy Schultz (2018), director of Public Narrative (a non-profit organisation dedicated to offering communications training to socially-engaged entities), social media needs to remain fully focused on engagement, quite beyond spread-

ing news of an activity. For this to take place, this communication can only be effective if it goes straight to your heart, if it is able to bring society alongside to empathise with it.

The main conclusion to be reached was that in social media La Fageda seeks to remain faithful to what it is, to its principles and identity. It furthermore brings into the La Fageda community or family its followers on social media platforms, generating the empathy that Schultz (2018) speaks of, although without appealing to social marketing, which could give rise to unwanted feelings of compassion.

In accomplishing this, La Fageda practices a pace of social media management that we might call *slow*, although not because it is slow-paced or lacking in intensity: quite the contrary. Its strategy is defined as slow for the movement meant to favour well-being as a way of life, and for more reflective, sustainable and human attitudes in production and technological consumption (Barranquero Carretero, 2013). In this way, the kitchen of the La Fageda networks openly holds that it would like to be proportional to the cooperative and create strong personal bonds digitally. Slowness is related to its way of working because the methodology achieved has open to the way for progressive growth and slow, although consolidated engagement. The principles taken from the posts of La Fageda on social media are as follows:

- Use of emojis: According to Danesi (2016), the use of emojis corresponds to the visual version of an informal conversation, like those that typically take place to make social contacts and to ensure open and cordial lines of communication. The posts of La Fageda are precisely the reproduction of this kind of dialogue. In total, in 19% of the posts analysed emojis have been used as a resource. In face to face communication, speakers use interjections, intonation and other strategies that go beyond words or phrases in expressing emotions. In informal digital messages, these sentiments are replaced by emojis.
- Horizontal treatment: Brought about by the two previous characteristics and directly derived from organisational procedure. Therefore, we see a transference to the network of the will to include everyone into the teaching community, each in whatever way they can.
- Inclusivity: According to Schultz (2018), this value is the first step towards taking on leadership, so that individuals might feel part of

a community or project. The tone used, and the colloquial style of the messages are oriented to this effect.

- Transparency: La Fageda makes evident on social media exactly what it is, what it thinks and feels and what drives it. The presence of images in 58% of posts, as well as videos (in 31%) with testimonies, is a clear example of the desire for transparency.
- Discreet commercial use: This is reflected in the posts which in this study have been considered marketing. There is a total of 78 such posts, and they directly and explicitly announce the La Fageda products.
- Network reciprocity: Certain messages and multimedia materials are used differently, as a function of the network and the type of public to be brought in for each event. This shows that the different organisational networks live together in a certain symbiosis, and that other identifying features of the cooperative are used in different ways, according to the platform in question.

Quite specifically, in each of its social media accounts, the activity carried out by La Fageda cooperative profiles is as follows:

Facebook: According to McCorkindale (2010) and Barrionuevo Almuzara, Estupinyà Pinyol and Martín Marichal (2014), this platform allows its users to set up links to share information. The use that La Fageda makes of it has precisely this objective. Users are spoken to directly, with features that have the goal of increasing engagement, using questions, short surveys and contests. For La Fageda, Facebook is a way of entering into relationship with its users and creating a community with them. The number of postings, which tends to be a single publication each day, shows the will to maintain this line of continuity without exaggerating when advertising products. For this reason, the account demonstrates a certain interest in getting to know the public, asking it to interact and empathising with it, engaging followers with subjects they may identify with.

Twitter: While the tone on Twitter is equally warm, the function of Twitter is clearly more informative. We can find many postings related to agenda, announcing events related to the cooperative, along with news on activities that have taken place, information on contests, job offers, and so on. The Twitter account is characterised

by its dynamic tone, despite the fact that there is normally a single tweet each day. For McCorkindale (2010) and Barrionuevo Almuzara, Estupinyà Pinyol and Martín Marichal (2014), it is an ideal tool with which to communicate news, send out alerts and inform of events on the calendar, amongst others.

Instagram: In this case, postings give an important role to images, which are converted in a specific way; the idea is not only to contact followers, show products and the context of La Fageda, but also to serve as a space where many followers can participate. There are, in fact, many images posted that were taken by someone external to the cooperative. With this demand for interaction, La Fageda is able to create a participative community that feels part of the project. We should also add that the texts of postings on Instagram are, in many cases, descriptive. They point out to the visual values of the site and the products, and play with the emotions, values and feelings inspired by the images posted. This more emotional side of things is a creative way of connecting with the public (Sheldon and Bryant, 2016).

LinkedIn: While the tone of posting is just as warm, this is the network where the least number of posts is made (an average of one every two days). The character of posts is fully informational. Most posts are related to job offers and institutional information related to the cooperative. An interview is published every now and then.

YouTube: The audiovisual versions of contents in written or text and image format are posted here (as in the case of contests, job offers, the colours of the La Fageda forest over the seasons of the year, seasonal products, and so on). The frequency of updating is more spread out than in any of the networks studied. In fact, in this case some 18 videos have been posted over a period of 3 months. The videos available were all edited by the cooperative and are just the same posted on other social media platforms where the cooperative is present.

All of the posts mentioned have some relationship to the identifying features of the cooperative, whether in the form of products, the setting or the people comprising it. The information posted also has the intention of spreading news and sending out a message about La Fageda.

It should be pointed out that, according to the results obtained, the platforms where La Fageda uses most of the images are Twitter and Ins-

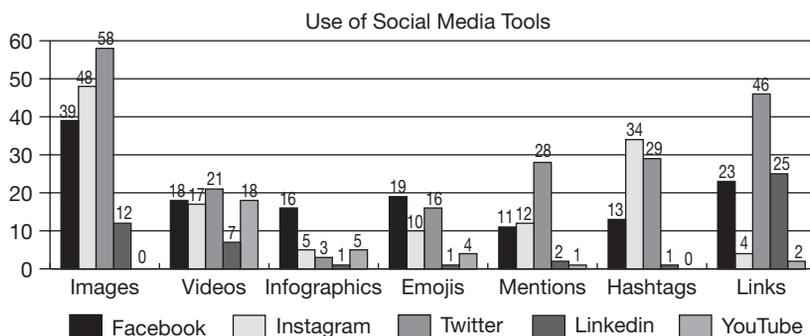


Figure 3. Use of Social Media Tools (2017).

stagram; on Twitter, but also on Facebook and YouTube, more videos are posted about the cooperative. When it comes to infographics, these are found especially on Facebook, which is also the case when it comes to the use of emojis.

On the other hand, as can be observed, Twitter is the social media platform where La Fageda makes most of the mentions of other accounts, and it is therefore where it most frequently reacts and requests a response with an eye for engagement, which are factors inherent to this platform. It is also where most of the hashtags are seen, together with Instagram. The most frequently used hashtags in social media by La Fageda are directly related to aspects that are closely linked to the cooperative's identity. In fact, *#fageda* is one of the most frequently used, but also *#fagedadenjordà* *#lagarrotxa* and *#catalunya*. In conclusion, these hashtags are connected to the territory, the community, the products and to La Fageda's consolidated image of proximity.

This factor of proximity is a feature that contributes to the consolidation of the community. The will to consolidate is also expressed through the use of basic aspects posted on social media and the result obtained from this. Mentions, links and hashtags are features that have the function of promoting interaction and engagement, while making it possible to search for posts on La Fageda accounts (Marwick and Boyd, 2011). The results indicate that while this sort of interaction is mostly seen on Twitter, Facebook and Instagram are the networks where the cooperative gets better overall results. Even the visualisations of videos are greater on Facebook than on YouTube. For this reason, La Fageda ensures public commitment from two social media platforms that fit well with the organisation's profile, due to their greater proxi-

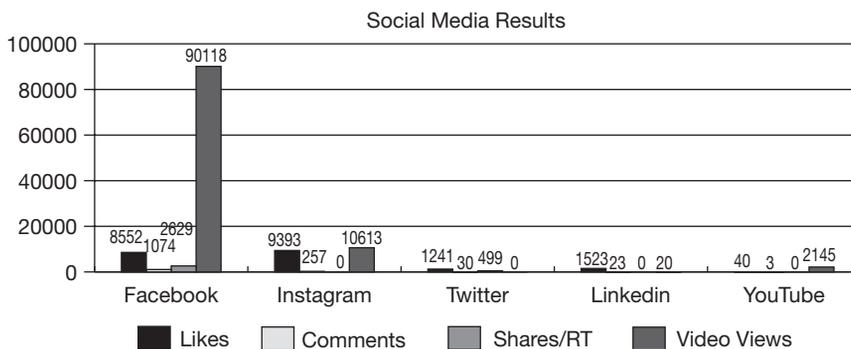


Figure 4. Social Media Results (2017).

mity and their way of creating and maintaining community, namely Facebook and Instagram.

## CONCLUSIONS

By analysing digital communication at the La Fageda cooperative, the research team was able to carry out a study of the organisation, with two clearly delineated sections that have now been merged. First, the study considered the history, the operations, and the development of the cooperative, as well as its objectives in the area of communication. Parallel to this, social media was tracked, with particular attention paid to those platforms where La Fageda has an account and is active. All told, this enabled us to view the results of both processes, with our conclusions indicated as follows.

First, it has been determined that digital communication in the La Fageda cooperative is coherent with the principles that the organisation holds as fundamental, namely people at the core, integrity, trust, responsibility, optimism, effort and quality. Taken together, they appear in the social media gradually and in relative parity, while priority is given to two values the cooperative itself prioritizes in its day-to-day activity, people and product quality. In similar terms, when an analysis is made of what aspects of the La Fageda identity have more presence on the social media (from amongst leadership, people, nature and the product), people and the product appear more frequently. We can therefore conclude that the principles the organisation has been developed upon are reflected

faithfully and coherently in the digital communication carried out through social media, demonstrating their consolidated character in the organisation (Duque Oliva and Carvajal Prieto, 2015).

Balance is a principle that the cooperative does not explicitly enunciate, although in this study of La Fageda many facets of it have been detected, in direct relation to flexibility. Balance is seen in the objectives, messages, relationships, development and perception of the social network in question. Proportion and self-awareness, as related to it, have proven to be key features in the consolidation of the project, which seeks to expand internally and grow deeper roots into its current environment, as part of its corporate and community identity. Cristóbal Colón (2018) explains that it is vital to diversify tasks to offer individuals more jobs, although without accelerating distribution or expanding production facilities.

These conclusions demonstrate that La Fageda is people-centered. The production of yoghurts is the means by which to improve the lives of those who are working in the cooperative. This, along with other tasks carried out, such as gardening and horticulture, are part of their therapy and contribute to the production chain (Esther Carreras, 2018). Moreover, such tasks are always adapted to each individual's capacity to develop them further. People are also at the core when it comes to social media and La Fageda, and it is quite clear that the organisation has a horizontal structure (Martínez and Cegarra, 2014). This is confirmed by employees, who insist that what they earn emotionally is more substantial than their economic compensation, since for them La Fageda is part of their identity.

People are at the core; however, on the level of communication, they are never used as a way to sell the product (Albert Riera, 2018). The La Fageda communication strategy has never consciously included direct advertising. The key way its products have become known is by word of mouth (Esther Carreras, 2018), a process activated by visits to the La Fageda facilities and the high quality of the cooperative's products. Neither does the strategy of La Fageda include social marketing, in any way, shape or form. According to Cristóbal Colón (2018), people should be purchasing La Fageda products because they are good, not because of the social project behind them, which can only really be understood after a visit to the facilities.

When it comes to social media, the study demonstrates that the pace with which they are used runs parallel to and is coherent with the cooperative's principles. What employees strive for is to build a consolidated

community, rather than growing at an unbridled rate; all growth is conceived to be controlled and accomplished as a group project.

The leadership seen at La Fageda has been called “caring leadership”, while the work of Cristóbal Colón is halfway between ethical leadership, based on his influence on the community in reaching objectives (Bass and Steidlmeier, 1999), and spiritual leadership, grounded in aiding the community in its efforts to reach an objective (Sanders, 2017). Accompaniment is essential for the leadership of Cristóbal Colón. That he is accompanying the project means he is implicitly present in all aspects of the cooperative. The only deliberate incoherence in terms of digital communication is that the founder of the project has a discreet presence online.

The project’s corporate challenge has been identified, in the last few years, as preparing the cooperative for the replacement of the leader, whose main principles are the very same as those found in the system he created. On the level of communication, the strategy followed, with no focus on the leader, will likely make the transition easier. Following on Niemeyer and Cavazotte (2016), in a period of uncertainty it is important to restore confidence, faith and optimism in organisations. Trust is one of the principles that La Fageda has promoted as its own, and faith and optimism can be derived from the rest of circumstances where the project is found. These are not then aspects to be revived; for all these reasons, the mood of uncertainty the cooperative finds itself in when faced with a future replacement of leadership will follow on a process that is closely tied to the current dynamic at La Fageda. Future research could study communication at that time, focusing on how it makes itself known and the perception users have of it, speaking in general terms.

This research also aims to be used in future as a guideline for companies like La Fageda, about how to communicate ethical leadership with consistency and balance. Organisations that identify themselves with the same or similar values could be interested in the techniques used, to clearly reflect the ethical values in social media.

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Míriam Díez Bosch  
Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations.  
Ramon Llull University  
miriamdb@blanquerna.url.edu

Alba Sabaté Gauxachs  
Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations.  
Ramon Llull University  
albasg@blanquerna.url.edu

Josep Lluís Micó Sanz  
Blanquerna School of Communication and International Relations.  
Ramon Llull University  
joseplluisms@blanquerna.url.edu

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