

The relationship between trust and communication: a comparative study of Taiwanese and Spanish universities.

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This article focuses on the relationship between communication and trust in organizations. Specifically, it proposes to study whether communication management influences the creation and growth of the trust that different stakeholders have in an organization. I will focus on one type of organization: universities; and on one specific stakeholder: students. The study seeks to compare two different cultural and social realities: the Eastern one (for which Taiwan has been chosen) and the Western one (for which Spain has been chosen).

The first part of the article will study the concept of trust in organizations and the cultural differences that exist between the Eastern and Western worlds with respect to this term. This will be followed by a brief theoretical introduction on the relationship between trust and communication in organizations. This will be combined with a comparative analysis between universities in Taiwan and Spain. Finally, some conclusions and recommendations are included.

The origin of this article is a research stay that I was able to develop in the summer of 2022 in Taiwan thanks to the MOFA Taiwan Fellowship for foreign teachers and researchers. During those months, in addition to having access to literature that studies the concept of trust in Taiwanese and Eastern society, I developed a questionnaire that I passed to 122 students from different universities in Taiwan. Subsequently, I administered the same survey to 70 students from universities in Spain¹. Although the methodological limitations of the study are evident, due to the size of the sample and the fact that it is not representative, I include the results here because they suggest interesting trends that could be studied in greater depth in future publications.

The design of the questionnaire took into account my objectives: firstly, to try to extract the concept of trust that students have in different cultural and geographical settings and, secondly, to measure the degree of trust they have in the university institution where they study and whether they consider that this trust depends on the communication management carried out by the university. Finally, given that this study took place while the world was facing a global pandemic, I will explore whether the coronavirus crisis has affected that perceived trust.

In academia, the relationship between communication with the public, especially internal communication, and trust in the organization has not been sufficiently explored, as proposed by Poloski, Rimac & Najjar (2020). Moreover, the study of trust in organizations has traditionally been confined to organizational contexts focused on economic exchange, whereas the university, which is more social in nature, requires different attention. In the literature review we have found a previous study conducted in universities (García Cruz and

¹ The reason for the numerical inequality of the sample in the two countries is a reflection of cultural differences. In Taiwan, there is a great deal of respect for authority, and when a professor asks them to fill out a voluntary survey, they all do so. In Spain, on the other hand, university students do not feel challenged in the same way when asked to fill out a voluntary survey, even if it is a professor who asks them to do so.

Valle, 2008), but focused on the relationship between university professors and their supervisors. In the present article we will study another stakeholder - the students - and rather than assessing the degree of satisfaction they feel, as was done in the aforementioned article, we will seek to explore whether the communicative activity developed by the institution helps students to grow in confidence with respect to their university.

The concept of trust in the East and West

It has been said that "It is trust, more than money, that makes the world go round"². However, trust is one of the most difficult intangibles to achieve and maintain, both between people and institutions, and even between nations.

Some have described trust as "the most important ingredient for the development and maintenance of happy, well-functioning relationships" (Simpson, 2007, p. 264). The many and varied benefits of trusting relationships have included increased social capital (Kramer, 1999), decreased conflict (Zaheer, McEvily, & Perrone, 1998), and increased prosocial behaviors, i.e., the set of positive behaviors for socializing and communicating with others (Yakovleva, Reilly, & Werko, 2010).

Trust has been defined in different ways over the years³. Most of the studies on institutional trust start from the definition given by Mayer et al (1995): "the willingness of a party to be vulnerable to the actions of another party based on the expectation that the other will perform a particular action important to the trustor, irrespective of the ability to monitor or control that other party".

Stephen M. R. Covey (2018, p. 55) highlights two elements from which the degree of confidence can be measured: character and competence. According to this author, character includes integrity, motivation and intention in relation to other people. Competence includes capacity, ability and tangible results.

The concern for maintaining and increasing stakeholder trust is a concern not only for the leaders of organizations but also for people working in communication departments. *The European Communication Monitor 2022*, a survey of communication professionals in 43 countries, shows that building and maintaining trust remains the top concern among communication professionals in Europe for the fifth consecutive year. The same concern is shared in other regions of the world. In Asia, for example, the *Communication Monitor* highlights the main strategic lines in the field of communication up to 2023. Thirdly, it includes building and maintaining trust.

In fact, communication can be used, and this is the main hypothesis of this article, as a key instrument to enhance the trust of the different stakeholders within the organization.

² Joseph Stiglitz "In No One We Trust." [opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com](https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2013/12/21/in-no-one-we-trust/). December 21, 2013.

³ It is advisable to consult the quantitative and qualitative analysis of the literature on the term trust by Marc Walterbusch, Matthias Gräuler and Frank Teuteberg: *How Trust is Defined: A Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis of Scientific Literature*. Osnabrück University, Germany

Since we intend to compare the concept of trust held by students from the East (Taiwan) and the West (Spain), a minimal approximation to the view of trust in these two cultures is necessary.

The word trust, in Chinese, is written *xin* (信). It is composed of two characters: person (人) and speech/words (言). Its basic meaning refers to the authenticity of the speech, the consistency between speech and actions, and that the speech and the intentions of the speaker match.

Trustworthiness, along with humanity, righteousness, ritual propriety and wisdom, is part of "the five constants" (五常) or "the five virtues" (五德) of Confucianism. Having received the attention of many rulers and thinkers throughout history, it has become an important moral concept in traditional Chinese society (Wang, Bao, Guan, 2020). In addition, the ability to generate trustworthiness is a key concept in Confucius' thought who says, "I cannot see how a person without trustworthiness could possibly get along in the world". Or also: "sufficiency of food, sufficiency of military equipment, and the people's trust in their ruler" are three important contents of governing a country but that "people's trust in their ruler" is the most important of the three" (Wang, Bao, Guan, 2020).

The cultures of many East Asian countries, such as Taiwan, China, Japan, and Korea, are deeply rooted in the philosophical teachings of Confucius, known as Confucianism (Hofstede & Bond, 1998). Specifically focusing on our case, it has been shown that the teachings of Confucian ethics are still very much alive in Taiwan (Lee, 2017; Liu et al., 2014; Yeh & Xu, 2010).

The second principle of what Confucius considers "the five relationships" focuses on the maintenance of harmony through the understanding of social organizations. According to this principle, a person is not perceived first and foremost as an individual, but is defined first and foremost by his or her membership in specific groups and his or her connection to others through networks of social relationships (Wang et al., 2005). Confucianism asserts that any action of an individual is a reflection of the social network to which he or she belongs. In other words, the maintenance of harmony is achieved through both devaluing one's individuality and emphasizing the importance of the "collective self" (Kwantes & Kuo, p. 54).

The concept of trust derived from Confucian ethics, *xin*, is not directly equivalent to the conception of trust held in the Western context (Koehn, 2001; Wee, 2011).

One of the main differences between the Confucian and Western conceptions of *xin* and trust lies in the relationship between *xin*, trust and morality (Wee, 2011). On the one hand, viewed through the Western lens, as stated above, a trustworthy person is perceived as possessing high morality that manifests itself in the form of capability, benevolence, and integrity (Mayer et al., 1995). Trust between two parties is established when both are willing to show vulnerability to the other, with the assumption and expectation of goodwill and upright morality between the person who trusts and the one who receives that trust (Kwantes & Kuo, p. 55).

Wee (2011) argues that morality is an integral aspect of trust in Western literature. The same is advocated by Tone (1995) who proposes that trust is based on the underlying assumption of an implicit moral duty.

A brief review of the history of Western philosophy shows that most moral philosophers have not written much about trust. As Tone Hosmer (1995, p. 394) points out, the classical ethicists-Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, St. Thomas Aquinas, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill, Kant, Smith, Jefferson, Ross, Rawls, and Nozick- barely mention the term, except occasionally, as an aside or an observation. Baier (1986, p. 232), who conducted his own survey of the philosophical literature on trust, was surprised at this lack of attention.

Western moral philosophy, until recently, has been almost entirely theoretical, with few applied concepts. Trust, consequently, took a back seat in ethics; it remained a result of proper actions, not a part of proper actions (Hosmer, 1995, p. 395).

On the other hand, Wee (2011) has analyzed the Analects of Confucius concluding that the conception of *xin*, or confidence in one's ethics, is not tied to expectations of goodwill or morality. Rather, according to the Analects, a person of *xin* need not necessarily be moral, although the conception of *xin* lays the foundation for the development of morality. However, the Analects also asserted that a *xin* person cannot be completely immoral, since a *xin* person must possess the capacity to reflect and evaluate what is appropriate or inappropriate in given contexts (Koehn, 2001) and use such reflections and evaluations as a basis for personal development for future actions.

Another important difference between Confucian *xin* and the Western approach to trust lies in the attribution of trustworthy behavior (Koehn, 2001). Trust attribution focuses on a person's characteristics in the Western perspective, whereas in the Eastern perspective, contextual factors are usually emphasized and taken into account in the formulation of *xin*. For example, when one person fails to meet the expectations of another, it is justified for that person to be labeled a traitor in the Western context. However, the same action labeled as "betrayal" may be evaluated differently in Confucian ethics, as emphasis would be placed on the context and situation in which the action takes place (Koehn, 2001).

It should be noted that this contextual emphasis in Confucian societies can only apply to group members or those who have established a relationship with the person being trusted (Kartolo et al., 2016).

As it is not the main objective of this article to study the term of trust and the comparison between the notion in the East and the West, it seems to us that it is enough with these brushstrokes to verify some of the main differences that can be useful for our study. Let us now move on to analyze whether these differences are shown among young people in each of these geographical and cultural areas.

In the open-ended question included in the questionnaire "What is trust for you?" students from Taiwanese universities highlight key aspects of interpersonal trust such as ability ("trust is being able to offer professional knowledge and high efficiency in management"), responsibility, thinking that the other is capable of meeting the expectations we have of

him/her, sharing the same thinking and wanting, and also the dependence and vulnerability involved in granting trust, assuming the risk. It is emphasized that it is a process that needs time to cultivate. At the same time, some students define trust in terms of what it produces in who trusts: tranquility, security, effectiveness in communication. Others emphasize aspects related to communication, such as those who say that trust is "believing that the information is correct and transparent, does not try to cover up anything and is true" or that trust is demonstrated when "actions are consistent with words".

Students from Spanish universities coincide quite closely with those from Taiwan. It could be said that most of them endorse the definition of Mayer et al (1995), highlighting factors such as benevolence, ability and integrity. It is interesting to note that several speak of trust in terms of "freedom of expression" or the possibility of "communicating freely" and that they point out the importance of the "environment" in the creation of this trust. Among the definitions collected, one of the students' stands out: "It is the attitude that is generated before a person, product or institution whose performance corresponds to what it should or what it claims to be. It is produced when one responds to what one really is, in a way that is predictable by a third party".

When asked to write two synonyms for trust, the concepts most frequently used by Taiwanese students are: believe, reliability, credit, affirmation, security, integrity, commitment, responsibility, respect, reassurance, steadfastness, honesty, loyalty, hope. As can be seen, some of them refer to the social or community aspect of trust, such as commitment, loyalty or responsibility.

In the case of the Spanish students, some of the synonyms coincide with those indicated by the Taiwanese students, such as security, hope, loyalty, sincerity or tranquility. However, they add some synonyms that did not appear in the previous case, such as "values", "reputation" or "determination".

As for antonyms, the most commonly used by Taiwanese students are: suspect, betray, deceive, mistrust, lie, doubt, distrust.

In the Spanish case, the most commonly used antonyms for the term trust are: fear, distrust, betrayal, insecurity, suspicion, doubt and uncertainty.

It is interesting to note that Taiwanese students use verbs to express antonyms, focusing on the action, while Spanish students mostly use nouns that, for the most part, reflect states of mind that occur in the person when he or she perceives that he or she cannot trust or that his or her trust has been defrauded.

Confidence levels in Taiwan and Spain

According to the *Edelman Report* measuring confidence in Spain, the confidence index in this country reaches 45 points out of 100 and has not changed due to the pandemic. Spain continues to be among the countries with the highest levels of distrust. According to the

results of the report, it is positioned as the fourth most distrustful country of the 27 surveyed by the company, only above the United Kingdom, Japan and Russia.

The main reason for this distrust, according to the report, is misinformation. The general population distrusts more than the informed population. The overabundance of information is fueling widespread distrust of leaders and social references, and citizens no longer know where or to whom to turn for reliable information. This phenomenon has been accentuated by the pandemic. However, according to the Study on trust in Spanish society (BBVA Foundation, 2022), in general, there is a medium, medium-high level of trust in institutions, organizations and companies. The institutions that arouse the highest level of trust are public health, the police and the army; the organizations that generate the least trust are political parties.

The report prepared by the BBVA Foundation also measures interpersonal trust. The conclusion is that trust predominates in the majority of people. The average on a scale of 0 to 10 is above the midpoint (5.3) and three out of four Spaniards give scores between 5 and 10. The expression of trust is up a few tenths of a point compared to the 2007-2013 period. The radius of closeness is clearly related to trust, decreasing as one moves from the closest to the furthest circles. The trust declared in family and friends is very high and decreases -even though it is high- when it comes to work/study colleagues, bosses/teachers, and even more in the case of neighbors, people from their town/city and, finally, people from their country.

The BBVA Foundation report highlights the moral dimension of trust in Western countries, in this case Spain. When it examines the incidence of different attributes in the generation of trust, the ranking is headed by those that refer to a moral dimension, such as honesty (telling the truth, keeping promises, acting ethically), which confirms what had been said in the theoretical study of the term in the West. Although somewhat lower, a more technical attribute, such as competence, is perceived as extremely important.

Belief in the validity of certain values in society clearly affects the level of interpersonal trust, according to the same study: it increases as the belief that most people act ethically or tell the truth increases. Indeed, among those who do not believe in the generalization of these values, distrust predominates.

In general, Taiwanese have shown lower levels of trust than other societies. According to the third wave of the *World Values Survey* (1995-1999), only 36.9% of Taiwanese respondents indicated that most people can be trusted, while 59.7% of respondents suggested that one should be cautious in dealing with people. This pattern of low general trust and high caution is also reflected in more recent studies conducted in Confucian societies. For example, Tan and Tambyah (2011) investigated the levels of general trust in various Confucian societies and found that Taiwan is among the Confucian societies that have very low propensity to trust and low levels of generalized trust.

In the latest wave of the *World Values Survey* (2017-2022) trust levels even dropped in Taiwan. Only 30.8% state that most people can be trusted, while in Spain that figure is more than ten points higher (41.0%). This difference in trust between the two countries can also

be seen in the question about trust in the family. In Taiwan, 79.7% totally trust their family, while in Spain 86.9% do. And when asked if they would trust someone they see for the first time, Taiwanese again show low levels of trust. Only 1.2% say they would trust completely, compared to 5.5% in Spain. Some 24.1% of Taiwanese say they would trust somewhat, while in Spain the average is 38.3% and 65.8% of Taiwanese say they would not trust very much, while in Spain the percentage is 42.7%.

However, although these low levels of trust are found in the interpersonal domain, Taiwan has been studied to exhibit relatively high trust toward organizations compared to other collectivist countries. For example, a study by Huff and Kelley (2003) explored differences in the propensity to trust other organizations among six Asian nations -South Korea, Japan, China, Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Malaysia- which represented collectivist cultures, and the United States, which represented the individualistic culture. From data collected from mid-level bank managers, the study results show that Taiwan demonstrated higher levels of external confidence than other collectivist countries. This pattern is also found in the *World Values Survey* data, with Taiwan scoring relatively high in trust toward external organizations, such as charities or humanitarian organizations, environmental organizations, labor unions, large corporations, banks, universities, and women's organizations.

Communication as a key element for building and increasing trust with stakeholders

Covey (2018, p. 47) has said that "the ability to create, grow, transmit, and rebuild the trust of all stakeholders is the key competency of leadership in the new global economy."

Trust and organizational culture are closely related since, as Fairholm (1994, p. 96) states, culture influences the willingness to trust, and the willingness to trust helps to define culture. On the other hand, the culture of an organization has a lot to do with the communication management that takes place in it. In fact, Allert and Chatterjee (1997) assert that the culture of trust is built, maintained, and entrenched through an appropriate positive corporate communication climate, and especially through the way a leader develops the culture of communication with his or her internal (and external) audiences. As Sanders (2020) states, trustworthiness (reliability) and communication go hand in hand.

Narbona (2020) develops three ways in which the communication department can contribute with its work to the growth of the spiral of trust within an organization.

To do so, he has based on the three constituent elements of trust, according to Mayer et al. (1995): integrity, capability and benevolence. First, the communication department must communicate integrity. Institutions should carry out frequent exercises to verbalize or make explicit the core values, to ensure that they are kept alive and do not fade over time.

The second element is capacity. The communication department can reinforce it in many ways. First, by promoting and disseminating actions that embody the institutional mission. Values must not only be communicated, but above all they must become a reality in the institution's day-to-day activities.

The spiral of trustworthiness is completed with the communication of benevolence. In this area, a first proposal made by Narbona is to learn to ask for forgiveness. In the face of a serious error, the request for forgiveness must be extended in time: past, present and future. It is necessary to recognize the error committed (remembering the past), to make reparation to those affected (in the present) and to rectify the causes that provoked it (to avoid repeating the same errors in the future). This is the only way to heal a wound and restore the trust that may have been defrauded.

All of this highlights how, in ordinary communication work, there are many opportunities to work to gain the trust of the organization's audiences. In fact, more and more often, organizations are seeking to build trust primarily through communication. A study conducted by *Corporate Excellence* in 2022 pointed out that one way to strengthen long-term relationships of trust is to encourage dialogue and active listening to stakeholders and the environment. Clara Fontán, Director of Intelligence and Knowledge at *Corporate Excellence - Centre for Reputation Leadership*, states that "Trust is an essential factor for business growth and sustainability. While trust in governments has been declining in recent years, for many citizens, companies are positioning themselves as the only trustworthy institution. Companies are aware of the opportunity this represents, and 35.5% are already working on strengthening stakeholder trust through the practice of active listening and dialogue in order to understand what matters most to them and what concerns them"⁴. Although there is this intention on the part of the companies, it is important to have ways to evaluate that this dialogue and active listening are actually taking place. A recent study conducted by *PWC* in the United States reveals that 87% of company executives say that their customers trust their companies a lot. But those customers see things differently: across all industries, consumer trust levels stand at only 30%. There is also a gap, albeit a smaller one, between employers and employees. Eighty-four percent of managers say that employee confidence was high in their companies, but only 69% of employees say the same⁵.

According to Allert and Chatterjee (1997), precisely communication is essential to close this "trust gap". Some research (e.g. Jiang and Luo, 2018; Togna, 2014; Reis Neto et al., 2018; Yue et al., 2019) reveals that internal communication is effective in building trust in organizations.

Moreover, trust takes place in a social context that, in turn, determines that trust relationship. Bhattacharya, Devinney, and Pillutla (1998) state that it is not possible to think that individuals or organizations have innate levels of trust and reliability independent of the environment. Such trust is especially tested in times of crisis. For this reason, we wanted to ask students in the survey how the pandemic caused by COVID-19 has affected their trust in the university.

With respect to Taiwanese university students, the impact of the pandemic on trust in the university institution was low (4.37 out of 10). As an open-ended question was included to

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<https://www.corporateexcellence.org/recurso/approaching-the-future-2022-report-trends-in/36b32bd1-e3fd-689a-fbd1-28ab5ff2e42f>

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<https://www.pwc.com/us/en/services/consulting/library/consumer-intelligence-series/trust-new-business-currency.html>

allow them to add reasons, those who indicated that the management of COVID had greatly influenced their confidence in the institution indicated the following reasons:

- "the university hides part of the number of contagions and lacks clarity on how to treat those infected or quarantined"
- "class rules are not established".
- "The national regulations and the measures taken by the university are different from the expectations of our parents, with which, I don't know what I should follow or do."
- "For foreign students like me, the university does not guarantee the possibility of online classes. The treatment between local and foreign students is different."
- "The university puts weird rules that cause discomfort to the individual, we have to obey even if they are small things."
- "Adopted regulations related to COVID-19 affect the quality of classes."
- "Safety regulations change all of a sudden."
- "Now the university has control of access and this is going to reduce our freedom. Strict regulations will not guarantee a consistent standard. At the same time, as students now have virtual classes, it is going to decrease interpersonal relationships between students, professors and the university."
- "Less time in college."
- "I had a professor who told us that he was infected with COVID-19, so he switched from the face-to-face class to the virtual class by playing videos for us. We have no way of knowing if the professor was really sick or not, it hurts our right to receive education."
- "At the peak of the pandemic in May, there was a gap between the actual number of confirmed cases and the ones they put on the university's website."
- "You have to scan the contact tracking QR code when entering the university and it's annoying. We even have to pass a lot of paperwork or documents to organize activities and there are limits on the number of people who can be in the same space. They say it's all because of the pandemic, but in my opinion that's purely laziness."

As can be seen, some of the students express distrust towards the university or the people who compose it. This distrust stems from the lack of accuracy in the data that is published, the sudden changes in the regulations to be respected, the strict way in which compliance with those same regulations is demanded, the absence of rules for classes, or what is perceived as little active involvement of the university when they want to organize activities. Several also focus on how the pandemic meant a decrease in attendance, so that they were affected in their learning and in the possibility of interacting among the different members of the university community.

In contrast, those who say that COVID has not impacted the confidence they had in their university point to the following reasons:

- "I believe the university has appropriately adopted pandemic safety regulations."
- "The university gave immediate response."
- "The university has sufficient technological resources."
- "Because I believe that the measures taken to combat the pandemic are reasonable."
- "I feel confident and calm about how the university reacts with the pandemic outbreak."

Most of them feel comfortable and secure with the regulations that are being applied in their universities, find them reasonable and have sufficient technological resources to be able to continue teaching normally.

In the case of Spanish universities, the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on trust in the institution is relatively higher (4.93 out of 10) than in Taiwan, although it is still complexly low. Among the reasons for those who say that the impact of this crisis on their confidence is high, the following can be highlighted:

- "A lot of disorganization in terms of teaching the subject online."
- "As an international student, I relied on the University regarding travel updates, classes and personal circumstances. At first, they had to be lenient and accommodating to the student body. But they were not as responsive to international students. We would end up getting false information, or missing information, and we would have to act quickly on the spur of the moment. Basically, we didn't feel as supported or respected."
- "Because they didn't seem to care about people's health since we still had to attend face-to-face. International people like me who could not come because of visa problems were not given a welcome guide and were not taught how to use the student intranet. I missed a lot of classes and the teachers did not know how to use email or zoom. It was a very bad first impression".
- "Because it has been a situation that has shown the mismanagement of the university."
- "A lot of uncertainty in a lot of things."
- "We lost a lot of classes due to covid."

The reasons were mainly related to the difficulty in following classes normally and having clear information to reduce uncertainty.

Among those who consider that the pandemic did not affect their confidence in the university, the following responses stand out:

- "The university made the transition from face-to-face to online classes as organic as possible. In addition, they took into account family, health or other circumstances and, in many cases, the professors became great confidants and psychological support. That doesn't mean that they stopped giving syllabi, and it doesn't mean that they all did. Since we have had face-to-face classes, that has not changed. I think professors are closer and care much more about their students and their well-being."
- "My experience at the university started right around the Covid-19 crisis and they were a perfect fit for everything we needed."
- "It hasn't affected, from first to fourth (grade) I've felt the same."
- "We could rely on the cleanliness and safety that is in place at the university."
- "They have only made improvements to adapt to the situation, if anything my confidence has increased."
- "The university took right actions at the perfect time. It even improved the confidence I had towards the uni."
- "The move from face-to-face to online was fast and effective from day one."

As in the case of Taiwan, those who value positively the response of their universities especially emphasize the speed with which they adapted to the new situation, favoring the possibility of continuing to attend classes, the security caused by the cleanliness and the measures aimed at combating the epidemic. In the Spanish case, moreover, several people commented that their confidence grew during this time, thanks to the way the situation was managed. The role of the teachers, whose empathetic and close attitude contributed to the growth of confidence, is also highlighted.

Among the elements that they consider to have contributed most to the reliability of their university during the pandemic, students from universities in the two countries agreed that "the university had sufficient technological resources to adequately follow classes online". In addition, both respect for safety regulations and the flexibility and adaptability of the professors played an important role.

On the other hand, among the elements that they consider to have contributed most to the unreliability of their university during the pandemic, the Taiwanese students point out the following: 1) the university authorities have not adequately respected the national regulations regarding security; 2) the professors have not adequately respected the security norms (use of masks, disinfection of common places, etc.); 3) poor adaptation of the programs and didactics to the particular situation.

Students from Spanish universities, however, emphasize teaching activity more than health safety regulations and point out these elements: 1) difficulty in following classes online, if necessary, due to the lack of adequate technological resources; 2) poor adaptation of programs and didactics to the particular situation; 3) unwillingness of university members to collaborate in solving problems related to the pandemic: inability to attend classes, etc.

Trust in universities: a comparative study.

For Zucker (1986, p. 82), trust in institutions is a type of trust that does not depend on interpersonal familiarity and common history, but is based on formal, socially produced and legitimized structures that guarantee that trust. Among these institutions, we could include universities: learning and development environments that have been socially produced and legitimized.

Although this initial trust in universities exists because they are legitimate and legitimized institutions, it is no less true that it must be confirmed based on the behavior of the organization, the experience of the different stakeholders that make up the university community and the social results derived from its activity. The premise of this article is that this trust is also reinforced by a strategically developed communicative activity.

Gilbert W. Fairholm (1994, p. 130-131) lists four ways for an organization's managers to improve the trust of its publics. First, he cites participation, i.e., being able to develop an open communication style that allows different audiences to participate in decision making. Secondly, he cites an attitude of help and support from leaders to their stakeholders, for which it is necessary to understand their needs. Thirdly, it suggests active and empathetic

listening and, finally, a coherent leadership style. As can be seen, three of Fairholm's four recommendations are based on communication to involve everyone in the decisions and evolution of organizational activity, to understand the requirements and needs of the public and to listen actively to them.

In the exploratory study I carried out with university students, I wanted to see whether they perceived communication to be related to improving trust in universities. Therefore, most of the questions in the questionnaire (see Annex) were aimed at studying this link.

Asked about the degree of confidence they usually have in their university, Taiwanese students say they have high confidence in their university (an average of 7.36 on a scale of 1 to 10). Spanish students have a lower degree of confidence (6.77 on a scale of 1 to 10).

To further explore the relationship between trust and communication, the questionnaire included several statements in which they were asked to indicate the degree to which they agreed (1-none, 10-very much). In general, the students interviewed see a strong relationship between trust and other intangibles such as reputation (8.27). They also agree that trust depends on a listening attitude (7.84), improved communication (8.11), transparency and accountability (8.20), interpersonal relationships (7.8) and organizational culture (7.74).

As can be seen, the survey participants agree with all the statements. The highest degree of consensus is found in the statement "trust generates a better reputation" while the lowest degree of consensus is found in the statement "trust depends on the organizational culture (the behaviors that occur in the organization)".

They were then asked to what extent they agreed with statements that applied to their universities. This question sought to focus on some behaviors that, according to the hypothesis of this article, are related to the trust generated in the audiences.

To what extent do you agree with these statements (from 1-none to 10-very much) My university...

	Average students Taiwan	Average students Spain
respects and is committed to the social and environmental environment	7,68	7,65
is able to deliver what it has committed to deliver	7,71	6,91

provides clear and accurate information	7,30	7,25
listens to the interests and expectations of its audiences	7,37	6,68
treats students equitably and fairly	7,62	6,91
takes into account the opinion of students before making decisions that affect them	7,36	6,81
is consistent between what it says (its values) and what it actually does	7,27	7,02
provides an adequate response to students' interests and expectations	7,33	6,95

Table 1

As can be seen in Table 1, the statement about respect and commitment to the social and environmental surroundings and the statement referring to the information provided by the university have similar scores in the two geographical contexts. However, in the rest of the statements, Spanish students give lower scores in all cases. It is particularly striking that the lowest score corresponds in both cases to the statement "the university is coherent between what it says (its values) and what it actually does", which points to "punctum dolens": the role played by coherence in maintaining trust. As Elizalde (2009, p. 143) points out, trust can only be achieved in the long term and through a process of building reputation and credibility, and credibility is a social relationship that results from perceiving and rationally evaluating the coherence between the intentions expressed by the organization and their adequacy with the objective reality.

Entering more specifically into the relationship between trust and communication, students were asked about the use of some communication resources by their university. The analysis of the results shows that universities have most of these resources. The table shows the unified data for the two countries studied:

Some communicative actions facilitate the creation and enhancement of trust. Please check if your university has the following resources:

Communication resources	Yes	No	I do not know
community-building events	83,3%	5,2%	11,5%
opportunities for dialogue between students and university faculty/governors	74,3%	6,3%	19,4%
mailing list to communicate important news to all students	86,4%	5,2%	8,4%
newsletter of relevant information for students	72,5%	8,2%	19,3%
channels for listening to your students' needs/expectations/suggestions/complaints	67,5%	6,3%	26,2%
updated website with all the necessary information	81,1%	6,8%	12,2%
student intranet	80,6%	4,2%	15,2%

Table 2

The most used resource in the universities, according to the students, is the mailing list. On the other hand, only 67.5% of students say they are aware of the existence of channels for listening to needs/expectations/suggestions/complaints. In the case of Spain, the percentage

is even lower: 50% say that these channels do exist, 14.3% say that they do not and 35.7% say that they do not know.

When asked "Which of these elements do you think should be implemented in your university in order to increase the trust you have in it?" they mainly point out the following (in order of voting): 1) opportunities for dialogue between students and university professors/governors; 2) channels for listening to students' needs/expectations/suggestions/complaints; 3) events aimed at strengthening the university community. This pattern is the same in the case of the two countries, which shows that university students demand the same thing regardless of the cultural and geographical context: to reinforce the opportunities to meet with other members of the university community and to be heard by the university.

As it was understood that the elements selected might not cover all the possible responses, an open question was included in which the interviewees could indicate another element that they considered necessary to implement in their university to increase the confidence they have in it.

These are the answers given by students from Taiwanese universities:

- "When the pandemic began, so that it wouldn't affect students, it would have been advisable for the university to announce the changes earlier rather than waiting until the last minute."
- "Information should be clearer and more truthful."
- "If there are incompetent professors, instead of writing a feedback form, students should have the right to communicate directly with the university's governors."
- "I suggest offering an anonymous suggestion box at the university, so that people can express the opinions they dare not say."
- "I suggest organizing more events aimed at establishing interpersonal relationships between freshmen and seniors, so that freshmen can obtain study-related information."
- "That it provides open and accessible listening channels, so that students can know the progress of their appeals."
- "Put all the information about the same event together, instead of distributing it in different parts."
- "I hope the university's website will be clearer and easier to operate."

Some of these requirements refer to the quality of the information (that it be clear, truthful, fast and accessible) and to its efficient distribution. Others have to do with the students' voice being heard, so that they can express themselves anonymously and, therefore, with greater freedom, so that their opinion influences decision-making (regarding teachers, for example) and so that they know the progress of their requests.

In the case of Spanish students, some pointed out other ideas that they would advise to implement in the university such as:

- "Let them have it but use it. It's no good to have these tools and then the student doesn't use them because they don't receive answers or help."

- "That there are enough teachers to serve the student body without delay and that when students complain about the teachers, a review is done in case a change of personnel is needed."
- "Freedom to be, more capacity for debate, less judgment towards students, more variety and political freedom, more closeness towards rectors and professors."
- "Complaints to the rector's office".

Spanish students also ask that their complaints or requests reach the rector's office and that students have more capacity to make their opinions heard with respect to professors. In addition, they add that they would like more professors to attend to students, more closeness between governors and professors and students, and more freedom, expressed in variety, in the capacity for debate and in different political opinions being heard.

These are not minor issues. Most of them have to do with ensuring listening to audiences, which, as is well known, can contribute to building trust in an organization. A detailed study of 20 companies-10 selected from a Fortune list of the most admired companies and 10 from the list of the most hated companies in the United States-reported that "there was a significant positive association between the perceived quality of dialogic communication and the level of trust" (Yang, Kang, and Cha 2015, p. 187).

Considering that a manifestation of a proactive attitude towards listening to their audiences has to do with creating and using listening channels, a question was included in the questionnaire about whether they knew who to contact when they wanted to suggest or complain about something. 62.9% say yes, while 37.1% say no. These data suggest ample room for the creation of such channels by universities or for better communication of such channels if they already exist.

On the other hand, they were asked about their perception of the attitude of the listener when they submit a suggestion or complaint. In both cases it is mostly perceived as positive (7.04 out of 10 in the case of Taiwan, 6.6 out of 10 in the case of Spain), although there is also ample room for improvement.

Conclusions and recommendations

Based on each of the objectives proposed at the beginning of the article, the main conclusions drawn from the study will be briefly summarized.

With regard to the first objective, the study of the concept of trust in two countries with a diverse cultural, historical and spiritual tradition, the differences between the concept of trust in the Eastern world, influenced by the Chinese tradition, and in the Western world, influenced by Greco-Latin philosophy, have been briefly analyzed using bibliographic resources. The main differences that have been highlighted are the following:

- 1) In the Eastern context more importance is given to the whole and society (collective self) as opposed to the person (individual self) while in the Western world the individual is placed ahead of the collective.

- 2) In the Eastern world, the concept of trust is not as closely related to morality as in the Western world.
- 3) In the Chinese tradition the attribution of trust is largely dependent on the context and situation. In contrast, in the Western tradition the attribution of trust is largely related to the characteristics of the person.

Based on this theoretical study and comparing it with the exploratory field study carried out among students from universities in Taiwan and Spain, it has become clear that the definition of trust given by both audiences is very similar and does not seem to take into account the elements mentioned above. Taiwanese students give a definition of trust that is closer to the Western characteristics of the concept. The conclusion that can be drawn from this fact is the high influence of Western culture, mainly from the United States, in Taiwan especially among the study audience (young university students). In addition to having had the experience of living in Taiwan for three months and realizing the extent to which the Taiwanese admire and look up to the United States, the same U.S. State Department website states "The United States and Taiwan share similar values, deep commercial and economic links, and strong people-to-people ties, which form the bedrock of our friendship and serve as the impetus for expanding U.S. engagement with Taiwan"⁶. On the other hand, the globalized world in which we live makes it easier for young people to consume the same cultural products anywhere in the world, as demonstrated by a quantitative study on audiovisual consumption (Iglesias, 2020 p. 29-30) carried out among young people from seven countries, where similar patterns are observed in the preference of series titles around the world. Both these patterns and the ability to watch foreign productions reveal the extent to which young people are exposed to a globalized audiovisual culture.

The second objective of the article was to measure the degree of trust that young university students have in the institution where they study, comparing the two geographical contexts and analyzing whether the way communication is managed in the institutions has an impact on perceived trust.

Although due to the limitations of the quantitative study the data are not representative, the surveys conducted show that students in Taiwan and Spain have a high average confidence in their universities. Taiwanese students show a higher confidence (an average of 7.36 on a scale of 1 to 10) than Spanish students (an average of 6.77 on a scale of 1 to 10). Although, as we have seen above, the general population of Taiwan shows lower trust indices with respect to Spanish society, trust in institutions is high in the Asian country, perhaps because, as Zucker (1986, p. 82) points out, trust in institutions is a type of trust that does not depend on interpersonal familiarity, but is based on formal, socially produced and legitimized structures that guarantee that trust.

Following Fairholm (1994, p. 130-131) we can say that the study has confirmed that trust has to do with the possibility of participation in decision making, with the perceived attitude of help and support, with active and empathic listening and with a coherent and close leadership style.

⁶ <https://www.state.gov/u-s-relations-with-taiwan/> accessed on December 17, 2022.

The third and final objective sought to explore whether the crisis resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic had influenced students' confidence in their university. In general, respondents reported low levels of influence: in Taiwan an average of 4.37 out of 10 and in Spain an average of 4.93 out of 10. These data are in line with other studies cited above, which show that COVID has not brought about a major change in the previous levels of trust of the general public. Both Taiwanese and Spanish students agree that the most important thing for them during these months was the university's ability to adapt in order to be able to continue their education. Most of them understand the measures adopted by the institutions to contain the contagions and were reassured to experience them, but a few consider that they were excessive and, in some cases, arbitrary. They point out that the main negative point was the lack of presence and, consequently, the absence of relations between students and professors. They also emphasize the positive influence on their confidence of the university's ability to provide up-to-date, accurate and accessible information to students in a context as uncertain as that generated by the pandemic.

Finally, it is interesting to note that the Taiwanese students who thought that their university was not reliable attributed this to the application of security measures, while those from Spanish universities attributed it to the lack of capacity to continue with regular teaching activities. On the other hand, all agreed that the elements that had contributed most to their university being reliable during the pandemic were: having the necessary technological resources to be able to continue online classes, respect for security regulations and the flexibility of the professors to adapt to the new situation.

To conclude, I would like to make a few brief recommendations that emerge from the study and that may be useful for university governors. They have to do with the management of communication with students, the stakeholder studied in this article.

- 1) Students demand the existence of listening channels where they can express their needs, expectations, suggestions or complaints. Some of them suggest that one way to do this would be to create an anonymous suggestion box to allow them to express themselves freely. Others, however, would like to know about the progress of these suggestions and demand feedback from the institution.
- 2) Another of the most common demands is the concern that there should be more occasions for dialogue among students and between students, professors and governors to promote knowledge among the different members of the university community. It is suggested that there should be events that favor the interrelation between first year students and older students and more possibilities to coincide with the governors in order to have a greater protagonism in the decisions that are taken and in which the students are the first affected, as is the case of the election or evaluation of professors.
- 3) Universities are asked to give clear, unified and easily accessible information. Sometimes students feel lost and little informed. It is suggested to study the communication channels with the students, clarify what type of information will be given in the different channels and communicate it to the students so that they can be more effective.
- 4) Continuing with information management, it is essential never to deceive or hide information. Transparency and accountability are values that are here to stay, and younger generations are demanding them more strongly than previous generations.

- 5) Finally, it is necessary to reflect on institutional coherence. Public trust depends to a large extent on the perceived coherence between the organization's values (what it says) and its culture (what it does). Internal audits that assess consistency at different levels are essential to consolidate trust.

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Annexes

Annex 1: Questionnaire in Spanish

Confianza en las universidades

Esta encuesta se enmarca en un proyecto de investigación que busca estudiar la relación entre confianza y comunicación en las organizaciones, concretamente en universidades. Está dirigido a estudiantes. Muchas gracias por completar la encuesta que no te llevará más de 5 minutos.

Persona de contacto: Gema Bellido (g.bellido@pusc.it)

- Nacionalidad
- ¿En qué universidad estudias?
- ¿Cuánto tiempo llevas estudiando ahí?
 - menos de 1 año
 - 1-2 años
 - 3-4 años
 - 5 años o más

Define brevemente qué es la confianza para ti

Escribe dos sinónimos de confianza

Escribe dos antónimos de confianza

Indica el grado de confianza que tienes habitualmente hacia tu universidad (de 1-nulo a 10-mucho)

¿En qué medida estás de acuerdo con estas afirmaciones? En una organización...(de 1-nulo a 10-mucho)

- la confianza genera una mejor reputación
- la confianza depende de la actitud de escucha
- la confianza depende de la mejora en la comunicación
- la confianza depende de la transparencia y la accountability
- la confianza depende de las relaciones interpersonales
- la confianza depende de la cultura organizacional (los comportamientos que se dan en la organización)

¿En qué medida estás de acuerdo con estas afirmaciones? (de 1-nulo a 10-mucho) Mi universidad...

- respeta el entorno social y ambiental y está comprometida con él.
- es capaz de cumplir lo que se ha comprometido a cumplir
- facilita información clara y veraz
- escucha los intereses y expectativas de sus públicos
- trata a los estudiantes de forma equitativa y justa
- tiene en cuenta la opinión de los estudiantes antes de tomar decisiones que les afectan
- es coherente entre lo que dice (sus valores) y lo que realmente hace
- da una respuesta adecuada a los intereses y expectativas de los estudiantes

Algunas acciones comunicativas facilitan la creación y el aumento de la confianza. Marca por favor si tu universidad dispone de los siguientes recursos:

- eventos que crean comunidad SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- ocasiones de diálogo entre los estudiantes y los profesores/gobernantes de la universidad SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- mailing list para comunicar las noticias importantes a todos los estudiantes SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- newsletter de información relevante para los estudiantes SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- canales de escucha de las necesidades/expectativas/sugerencias/quejas de sus estudiantes SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- página web actualizada con toda la información necesaria SI – NO – NO LO SÉ
- intranet para estudiantes SI – NO – NO LO SÉ

¿Cuáles de estos elementos piensas que sería necesario implementar en tu universidad para que aumente la confianza que tienes en ella? Señala máximo 2.

- eventos dirigidos a reforzar la comunidad universitaria
- ocasiones de diálogo entre los estudiantes y los profesores/gobernantes de la universidad
- mailing list para comunicar las noticias importantes a toda la comunidad universitaria
- newsletter de información relevante para sus estudiantes
- canales de escucha de las necesidades/expectativas/sugerencias/quejas de los estudiantes
- página web actualizada con toda la información necesaria
- intranet para alumnos
- Otro:

¿Sabes a quién dirigirte si quieres sugerir o quejarte de algo?

Si No

Cuando presentas una sugerencia/queja, ¿la actitud del que escucha es? (1-negativa: poco interés por escuchar y mejorar; 10-positiva y abierta a recibir sugerencias y a mejorar)

Indica en qué grado la crisis ligada a la pandemia Covid-19 ha impactado en tu confianza en la universidad (1-nada; 10- mucho)

¿por qué?

Señala los 2 o 3 elementos que te parece que más han contribuido a que tu universidad sea confiable durante la pandemia:

- respeto de las autoridades de la universidad a la normativa nacional en cuanto a seguridad
- respeto de los profesores de las normas de seguridad (uso de mascarilla, desinfección de lugares comunes, etc)
- respeto de los estudiantes de las normas de seguridad (uso de mascarilla, desinfección de lugares comunes, etc)
- la universidad tenía los recursos tecnológicos suficientes para seguir adecuadamente online las clases, si era necesario
- los profesores han adaptado el contenido a la nueva situación, si era necesario
- disposición de los miembros de la universidad a colaborar para resolver los problemas ligados a la pandemia: imposibilidad de asistir a clase, etc
- flexibilidad y capacidad de adaptación de los profesores a la situación particular

Señala los 2 o 3 elementos que te parece que más han contribuido a que tu universidad NO sea confiable durante la pandemia:

- las autoridades de la universidad no han respetado adecuadamente la normativa nacional en cuanto a seguridad
- los profesores no han respetado adecuadamente las normas de seguridad (uso de mascarilla, desinfección de lugares comunes, etc)
- los estudiantes no han respetado las normas de seguridad (uso de mascarilla, desinfección de lugares comunes, etc)
- dificultad para seguir online las clases, si era necesario, por la falta de recursos tecnológicos adecuados
- poca disposición de los miembros de la universidad a colaborar para resolver los problemas ligados a la pandemia: imposibilidad de asistir a clase, etc
- poca adaptación de los programas y la didáctica a la situación particular
- poca flexibilidad y capacidad de adaptación de los profesores a la situación particular

Muchas gracias por tu ayuda.

Si estás interesado en leer parte de los resultados del estudio, por favor, indica tu correo electrónico para que te pueda enviar el artículo cuando se publique:

Annex 2: Questionnaire in Chinese

這份問卷旨在研究組織內部信任和溝通之間的關係，而這裡的組織指的是大專院校。問卷主要是針對大學生觀點來做學術上的研究，謝謝你們願意花五分鐘的時間來填寫這份問卷！

聯絡人: Gema Bellido(g.bellido@pusc.it)

-國籍

-請問你就讀哪間大學呢？

-請問到目前為止你在大學的就學期間是？

- 少於一年

- 一到兩年
- 三到四年
- 五年以上

請簡短敘述為你來說什麼是「信任」？

請你寫下兩個「信任」的「同義詞」

請你寫下兩個「信任」的「反義詞」

一般情況來說，你對所就讀大學的信任程度是幾分呢？（1為最低-10為最高）

請針對下列敘述依照認同程度給予1-10分（1為最低-10為最高）在一個組織當中...

- 信任帶來更好的信譽和名聲
- 信任取決於傾聽的意願和態度
- 信任取決於在溝通上的提升與改進
- 信任取決於透明度和當責（把事情做好並對結果負責）
- 信任取決於人際關係
- 信任取決於組織文化（指一個組織由其共有的價值觀、儀式、符號、處事方式和信念等內化認同表現出其特有的行為模式。）

請針對下列敘述依照認同程度給予1-10分（1為最低-10為最高）我的大學...

- 承諾並尊重整體社會環境
- 能夠履行所給予的承諾
- 提供真實且透明的資訊
- 傾聽它的受眾需求和期許
- 以公平公正的方式對待學生
- 在做出與學生相關的決定前，會先傾聽學生的意見
- 在所奉行的價值上言行一致
- 在學生的需求和期許上給予適切的回應

有些溝通方式可以增進彼此之間的信任。請在下列敘述中圈選你所就讀的大學是否有提供以下資源：

- 透過舉辦活動來創造校內的社群。 是、否、我不知道
- 提供學生、師長、學校執政者，三方的溝通對話機會。是、否、我不知道
- 透過電子郵件來發送重要訊息給所有學生。是、否、我不知道
- 透過校園電子報發送相關訊息給學生。是、否、我不知道
- 對於學生的需要/期許/建議/申訴提供溝通對話管道。是、否、我不知道
- 在學校網站上更新所有重要資訊。是、否、我不知道
- 學校提供內部網路給學生。是、否、我不知道

在下列敘述當中，你認為學校最應該優先採取哪些行動來提升你對它的信任？最多可圈選兩個

- 透過舉辦活動來加強校園社群的連結。
- 提供學生、師長、學校執政者，三方的溝通對話機會。
- 透過電子郵件來發送重要訊息給校內所有群體。
- 透過校園電子報發送相關訊息給學生。
- 對於學生的需要/期許/建議/申訴提供溝通對話管道。
- 在學校網站上更新所有重要資訊。
- 學校提供內部網路給學生。
- 其他：

如果你想要給予建議或是申訴，你知道要向誰或管道尋求協助嗎？

是、否

當你提出一個建議或是申訴時，聆聽者(校方)的態度是如何呢？請填寫1-10分(1-態度負面：對於聆聽和改善完全不感興趣；10-態度積極：對於聽取意見和改善保持正面開放態度)

新冠肺炎COVID-19疫情的出現也延伸出許多相關的問題，請問這是否也造成你對所就讀大學的信任程度產生影響呢？（1 - 完全沒有影響；10 – 影響我非常多）為什麼？

在下列敘述當中，你認為哪些作為是最能提升學校的信任程度呢？請選擇2-3項。

- 學校管理層遵守政府防疫措施
- 教師遵守防疫規定(佩戴口罩, 公共場域消毒等等)
- 學生遵守防疫規定(佩戴口罩, 公共場域消毒等等)
- 學校有足夠的科技軟硬體設備, 來執行線上課程(在必要情況下)
- 對於特定情勢, 教師在課程內容上有與時俱進(在必要情況下)
- 召集校內工作人員合作解決疫情所造成的相關問題, 如學生無法到校上課等等
- 教師對特定情況的靈活性和適應性

在下列敘述當中，你認為哪些作為是最「不能」提升學校的信任程度呢？請選擇2-3項。

- 學校管理層沒有適當地遵守政府防疫措施
- 教師沒有遵守防疫規定(佩戴口罩, 公共場域消毒等等)
- 學生沒有遵守防疫規定(佩戴口罩, 公共場域消毒等等)
- 學校沒有足夠的科技軟硬體設備, 來執行線上課程(在必要情況下)
- 對於特定情勢, 教師在課程內容上沒有與時俱進(在必要情況下)
- 教師在特定情況下不具靈活性和適應性

非常感謝你完成問卷的填寫！

如果你有興趣了解之後的研究成果，非常歡迎你留下你的Email，在論文發表後我會寄送副本給你！

你的Email:

