

COMMUNICATION AND COVID-19: COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES IMPLEMENTED BY THE PERUVIAN GOVERNMENT DURING THE SECOND WAVE

Ivonne Natalia Montes Vega*

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2648-9452>

María Elizabeth Muñoz Castillo**

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7659-9126>

Felipe Anderson Rios Incio***

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7049-8869>

Ángel Emiro Páez Moreno****

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0924-3506>

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ABSTRACT

This article analyzes the communication strategies applied by the Peruvian Government during the second wave of Covid-19. In order to support the variable "communication strategies" in times of crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the following approaches were used: Castillo-Esparcia (2020), Soto & Fernández (2020), Macassi (2020), Guibarra & Sánchez (2020), Lázaro & Herrera (2020). The research was developed methodologically with a quantitative approach. Ruling with the criteria of a non-experimental, descriptive design. An analysis was carried out at 734 hours of press conferences; 40 communication products from the communication campaigns 'Let's not lower our guard' and 'Put my shoulder' and 200 posts published on Facebook. The variables were operationalized in 3 dimensions and 15 indicators, measured using observation as a technique, and the observation guide as a data collection instrument. It was found as a final result that the press conferences were one of the main strategies that have served to maintain communication by the Government towards the Peruvian people. Additionally, Facebook was the main social network that served as a channel to communicate issues related to Covid-19, and the two communication campaigns were mostly informative and preventive.

* Universidad Cesar Vallejo, Trujillo, Perú. imontesv@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

** Universidad Cesar Vallejo, Trujillo, Perú. mcastilloji@ucvvirtual.edu.pe

*** Universidad Cesar Vallejo, Trujillo, Perú. frios@ucv.edu.pe

**** Universidad de Boyacá, Tunja, Colombia. aepaezmoreno@gmail.com

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Comunicación y Covid-19: Estrategias de comunicación implementadas por el gobierno peruano durante la segunda ola

RESUMEN

El presente artículo analiza las estrategias de comunicación aplicadas por el Gobierno peruano durante la segunda ola de la Covid-19. Para sustentar la variable "estrategias de comunicación" en tiempos de crisis como la pandemia de COVID-19, se utilizaron los siguientes autores: Castillo-Esparcia (2020), Soto & Fernández (2020), Macassi (2020), Guibarra & Sánchez (2020), Lázaro & Herrera (2020). La investigación se desarrolló metodológicamente en un enfoque cuantitativo, rigiéndose con los criterios de un diseño no experimental, descriptivo. Se realizó un análisis a 734 horas de conferencias de prensa; 40 productos comunicativos de las campañas comunicativas 'No bajemos la guardia' y 'Pongo el hombro' y 200 post publicados en Facebook. Las variables se operacionalizaron en 3 dimensiones y 15 indicadores, las cuales fueron medidas utilizando como técnica la observación, y la guía de observación como instrumento de recolección de datos. Se encontró como resultado final, que las conferencias de prensa fueron una de las estrategias principales que han servido para mantener la comunicación por parte del Gobierno hacia el pueblo peruano, además Facebook es la principal red social que sirvió como medio para comunicar temas relacionados al Covid-19, y las dos campañas comunicativas fueron en su mayoría informativas y preventivas.

Palabras Claves: estrategias de comunicación; covid-19; redes sociales; conferencias de prensa; gobierno.

Introduction

Since the end of 2019, the world has been facing a health crisis due to the coronavirus or Covid-19, forcing countries to develop prevention programs whose adopted responses emphasized the crisis and risks; therefore, reducing the perception of it (Fontana and Cabas, 2014). With the confinement and the millions of deaths, the interest of citizens for information increased. Given this, in the government's communication prevailed in crisis management, since in a pandemic situation it is necessary to propose communication actions to preserve the fluidity of truthful information and establish standards of behavior for society through awareness and citizen education (Almansa & Fernández, 2011)

Making an exploratory tour of some countries of the world, in Spain, the presence of the Government was noted providing information through the websites of the Ministries, holding press conferences and carrying out communication activities on Facebook, and Twitter (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020; García, 2019). In Uruguay, press conferences became the main nexus of citizen communication, where government messages were characterized by transparency, maintaining an unalterable line of communication (Mieres, 2020). The Government of Argentina divided the communication topics referred to "health" (30.2%) and the issues related to the socioeconomic impact of the crisis, such as "social policies" (17.6%), "works and public services"

(10.5%) and “Economy” matters (9.4%) (Cabas, 2020). As for El Salvador, President Nayib Bukele carried out a closed communication strategy on Twitter, providing information on the evolution of the pandemic and meeting the needs of the public (Soto and Fernández, 2020).

In Peru, the former president Martín Vizcarra announced the first case of Covid-19 on March 6th, 2020, subsequently declaring a health state emergency. From then on, Vizcarra's cabinet began to address Peruvians through messages to the nation with the purpose of informing about the confinement (Orozco, 2020). Likewise, the ministries used various publicity spots, educational videos, and flyers, mainly on the official websites of MINSA (Ministry of Health), MIDIS (Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion), MINAGRI (Ministry of Agriculture and Irrigation), PRODUCE (Ministry of Production), and others. In addition, they carried out the campaigns “I stay at home”, “First my health” and “The Covid doesn't kill alone”. Let's not be an accomplice” (Macassi, 2020). After a political crisis caused by the Martín Vizcarra vacancy, the subsequent resignation of the former president of the Congress Manuel Merino de Lama and his short presidential term; on November 17th, 2020, Francisco Sagasti assumed the President of the Republic position developing new strategies to keep the population informed about the contingency and take measures to prevent the spread of Covid-19.

Peru developed various communication strategies to keep citizens informed and educate them in the presence of Covid-19. These are considered communicative activities that generate a connection with the public to which an institution is directed, promoting information exchanges, so that citizens understand what is happening in their environment, carried out through a series of procedures: the type of communication, media, adaptation of the message, etc. (Arellano, 2008; De Lorenzo, 2014); They also carry out three (3) missions: demand the study of the link between the organization and its public; describe the line of communication, that is, indicate the systems that are favorable to use; generate a relationship between communicative actions within a corporation (Pérez, 2001).

In front of a health pandemic, the need for information is multiplied, so it is necessary to use communication strategies to maintain the flow of truthful information and contribute to citizen education (Noguera, 2005; Názaró et al., 2019). During information management, strategies are designed that can be reflected through oral tactics: speeches by the president, press conferences and interviews; written tactics: hand washing campaigns, through advertisements in traditional or digital media; and visual tactics: mainly carried out through social networks and television (Ferreiro, 2012; Mas-Manchón and Guerrero, 2019).

One of the main communication strategies carried out by the countries were press conferences, understood as meetings organized to invite the media offer information simultaneously, and develop with clear language so that it reaches the largest number of audiences. Furthermore, in the context of a health emergency, it is used as a means of transmitting messages and recommendations to the population, as well as to inform about the disease and explain the strategy that the government has adopted to manage the health crisis (Amado et al., 2019; Guibarra and Sánchez, 2020).

On the other hand, social campaigns are presented, which execute communication strategies proposed by the government to inform and raise awareness of the problems within the nation. Many campaigns have placed messages in media that reach large audiences, such as television or radio, or outdoor settings, while other campaigns incorporate new technologies such as digital media (Frenette and Reyes, 2011). These can function as ways to change the

population's behavior or seek to directly affect individual recipients through cognitive or emotional invocation (Wakefield et al., 2010).

Likewise, digital media have been the most used medium to publish information about Covid-19 due to its speed and scope (Lázaro and Herrera, 2020); in addition, helping government entities analyze citizens' situations (Barde and Pennington-Gray, 2018; Wang et al. 2021). Information and communication technologies (ICT) expanded the ability of government agencies to communicate and interact with the public (Zeemering, 2020) more during the pandemic, where citizen participation increased through social media, driven by the efforts of government communication, as a common response to the emergency (Steen and Brandsen, 2020; Valera et al., 2018).

So, in crisis situations, communication must emerge immediately, forcing to respond to a situation posed by the context (Amadeo, 2016), since it plays a fundamental role not only because it is how politics becomes visible in society, but because through government communication, public institutions seek to restore trust and the persistence of values, which were damaged by the crisis (Thompson, 1995; Echavarría and Maurizi, 2013).

The research is linked to the theory of the "communication flow in two steps" in which the actions of the media, leaders, and the personal contacts they have with individuals and social groups to which they belong are joined. For Katz and Lazarsfeld (2006), it sustains that media communication would reach the public indirectly, moving first through the opinion leaders present in the communities. It is worth mentioning that during crisis management the presence of the government leader, that is, the president of the nation is necessary (Diaz & Castromil, 2021). Another of the theories related to our article is the agenda setting, referring to a list of subjects or topics that are constituted from events or situations of public interest. Divided into: the media agenda, the public agenda, and the politicians' agenda (Petroni, 2009). The first one is a list of issues that the target audience considers highly relevant; this is measured through surveys. The media agenda is a list of issues with the most media coverage. Finally, the political agenda is defined as a list of issues and actions that politicians consider relevant (Zhu and Blood, 1996)

Since the beginning of the year 2021, Peru has been facing the second wave of Covid-19; together with a political crisis before this, the following research question was formulated, how were communication strategies developed during the second wave of Covid- 19 in Peru?

The objective was to analyze the communication strategies applied by the Government of Peru during the second wave of Covid-19. In addition, the specific objectives were to analyze the messages issued in the press conferences applied during the second wave of Covid-19, identify the communication campaigns carried out by the Government of Peru during the second wave of Covid-19 and identify the communicative activity in the social networks of the Peruvian Government.

The research is justified on the importance of recognizing the use of communication in crisis management and identifying the most effective strategies to be executed by various actors during a health crisis.

Methodology

The research is of an applied type, based on the search for the application or use of acquired knowledge, after having executed and systematized the research-based practice, with a quantitative approach, which consists of contrasting the theories that exist based on an

extensive series of supposed hypotheses (Tamayo, 2007). On the other hand, a non-experimental design was developed since the study variable wasn't manipulated and only the existing situations were observed (Hernández et al., 2014). In addition, it met the requirements of a descriptive investigation. On the other hand, it is a cross-sectional study; when collecting data from January 18th to May 18th, 2021, this aims to describe the variables to be able to analyze the incidence and interrelation at a given moment (Cortés and León, 2004).

The study variable was the so-called communication strategies. It should be noted that a variable is a construct or concept developed by the inquirer to refer to various phenomena or events in reality (Freire, 2018). In addition, the research focused on three (3) dimensions, which responded to our specific objectives: (1) press conferences, (2) social campaigns, (3) social networks. In order to carry out the research, the observation technique was developed, relying on an observation guide as a data collection instrument, since it allows the collection and obtaining of data and information on an event or phenomenon that occurred (Campos and Lule, 2012). A population was also established and understood as the result of study units with similar characteristics necessary for the study (Ñaupas et al., 2018). Our research consisted of 734 hours in press conferences, two (2) social campaigns, and the content of 200 Facebook posts of the Peruvian Government. The instrument was validated through expert judgment, obtaining an Aiken's V coefficient of .98 (strong validity).

Results

Table 1. Summary by categories of press conferences

Formal composition			Structural Composition	
Duration	Topic	Participants	Place	Resources used
11 to 70 minutes	Actions and Measures of the Executive against the Covid-19 pandemic	2 to 3 people	Tupac Amaru Room of the Government Palace	Handling of figures and statistics

Note: The summary of 734 hours of press conferences is presented

Regarding the press conferences issued by the Peruvian Government from January 20th to May 18th, 2021 (Tv Perú, 2021), the one that had a minimum duration of 11 minutes, was those issued by the President of the Republic Francisco Sagasti on January 26th, to report on Covid-19 prevention measures, while the longest conference was held by the President of the Council of Ministers Violeta Bermúdez, having a time of 70 minutes. 90% of the topic addressed were the actions and measures of the Executive against the Covid-19 pandemic; 10% belongs to very particular issues, such as problems with the vaccine, among others. 50% of the conferences had 2 participants; 33.3% with 3; 11.1% with 4, while 5.5% of the conferences were directed only by Francisco Sagasti. On the other hand, the most frequent participant was Violeta Bermúdez.

Regarding the structural composition, 94% of the press conferences were held in the Tupac Amaru Room of the Government Palace, the handling of statistical figures was used in 94% in the press conferences and the use of multimedia equipment and slides by 12%.

Table 2. Summary by categories of social campaigns

Campaigns Social	Topics covered	Main message	Visual resources	target audiences
Let's not lower our guard	Protection measures against Covid-19	Do not lower your guard and continue to take care of yourself inside and outside the home	Flyer, spots and educational video.	The general population, young people, homes with the elderly and pregnant women.
I put the shoulder	Efficiency of the vaccine for the protection of the population	The vaccine as a hope to stop infections	Spot and flyers	The entire population, older adults, and front-line personnel in the fight against Covid-19

Note: The social campaigns presented are those started during the second wave

To identify communication strategies were analyzed 40 communication products published on the MINSA and PCM web pages (Ministry of Health [Ministerio de Salud], 2021; Presidency of the Council of Ministers [Presidencia del Consejo de Ministros], 2021). During the "Let's not lower our guard" campaign, emphasis was placed on protection measures to avoid getting infected with Covid-19, through a message that sought to make the population aware of not lowering their guard and keeping the biosecurity protocols in our homes. Furthermore, to value the front-line staff's work in the fight against Covid-19. The communication strategies were divided into Spots, educational videos and flyers characterized by informing about health protocols such as proper handwashing, correct use of a double mask, constant disinfection inside and outside the home, restaurants, markets, work and public transport, and avoid social gatherings, family and crowded places. Through the spots they intended to raise awareness about the work of front-line personnel in the fight against Covid-19 and the sacrifice they make to protect the population. The materials developed by MINSA and PCM were designed for the general population, emphasizing families whose homes had people vulnerable to the virus (the elderly, children and pregnant women). Part of the campaign was aimed at people in charge of purchases or who had to go to work.

The "Put the Shoulder" campaign transmitted to the population the efficiency and importance of vaccination, showing it as a hope to stop the contagion of Covid-19, especially to the most vulnerable citizens. For this, different spots and flyers were made, part of the spots highlighted the work of the doctors during the vaccination process, exposing testimonies of some of them, who expressed the importance of getting immunized, also encouraging health personnel

to get vaccinated; in addition, the vaccination of the elderly was monitored. Despite the fact that the campaign was related especially to vaccination, the informative material that was exposed on the official PCM page was linked to biosafety measures against Covid-19, in which they offered advice on the care that should be followed by people inside and outside the home, the care of the elderly and pregnant women, as well as the use of the pulse oximeter as a means of alert. The public, to whom the campaign was directed, in that period, was the elderly, as well as medical personnel, firefighters, PNP and Armed Forces.

Table 3. Summary by categories of the social network Facebook

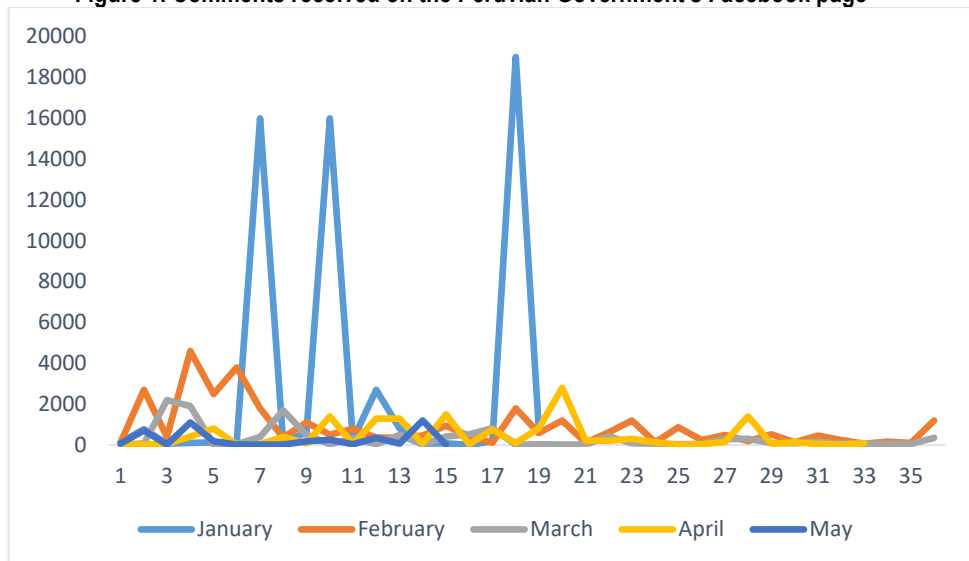
Most covered topics		Most used visual resources	Most discussed topics
Care against Covid-19 (28.6%), vaccination process (32.9%) and Bono600 (12.9%).		Animated Flyers, Photographs, Live Streaming, and Educational Videos.	Vaccination process, Sagasti management, vaccine privatization, economic reactivation and bono600.

Note: Summary of 200 posts published on Facebook

When starting the analysis of the communication strategies of the Peruvian Government's Facebook, from January 18th, 2021 to May 18th, it was evident that the themes of the publications issued were mainly oriented to care and prevention against Covid-19, the vaccination process, and the Bono600 that would be distributed to the population. The preventive publications were divided into messages about maintaining biosecurity measures such as hand washing, social distancing, the correct use of the mask, under specific campaigns or hashtags such as #NoBajemosLaGuardia, # DileNoAlas3C and #CubreNarizBocayBarbilla. On the other hand, at the beginning of the vaccination, the publications sought to satisfy the information on the management for the purchase of doses from the foreign pharmaceutical companies Pfizer, Sinopharm and AstraZeneca, as well as the arrival of doses to Peru and their distribution in each region of the country. Likewise, the inoculation of front-line personnel in the fight against Covid-19 (doctors, nurses, Peruvian National Police, Armed Forces) was evidenced, as was the immunization of older adults. In February, when the delivery of the so-called Bono600 began, an economic protection that the government assigned to households in situations of vulnerability, for this, publications were made to inform about what the benefit consisted of, the different groups of beneficiaries, the payment modalities, also encouraging them not to go to the bank.

Regarding the visual content, flyers with animations were used; Photographs; Live broadcasts from the national channel TvPerú and videos to raise awareness among the population. On the other hand, the topics discussed in the comments were very varied, often not even about the type of content uploaded to the page. The management of Francisco Sagasti was discussed; In addition, the vaccination process called for the privatization of vaccines to speed up the immunization process. On the other hand, they complained about the system established to obtain the Bono600, to this was added all the times that economic reactivation was requested for those who didn't have a fixed income or had their small businesses.

Figure 1. Comments received on the Peruvian Government's Facebook page



Note: Data were obtained using the AgoraPulse tool

The content of the Government's Facebook had different reactions shown in the number of likes and comments left by users. The content that involves Francisco Sagasti was the one that had the most interaction, while those directed to biosafety measures didn't obtain a great reaction from the public. It should be noted that the publication with the most likes (25 thousand) and comments (19 thousand) in the entire period studied was that on January 31st, a live broadcast where President Francisco Sagasti spoke about the agreements and contracts to obtain doses of vaccines against Covid-19, as well as the restrictions that would apply until February 14th. On the other hand, the content with the least likes (11) was on March 16th, an educational video that explained the importance of wearing masks even at home if you live with vulnerable people. It is worth mentioning that the comments made by the followers of the page never received a response to their complaints or concerns.

Discussion

The main character in the press conferences studied is the President of the Council of Ministers, because she was present in most of the events; while the interim President Francisco Sagasti, rarely gave a conference, and when he did was in a short time of 11 minutes. However, in the Government of Spain, it was the president who provided information to his entire country through press conferences, followed by his ministers and technical personnel (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). It is highlighted that the presence of the government leader was scarce in press conferences, while in Spain the president addressed his population consecutively through speeches that he issued through the media. On the other hand, the total duration is 734 hours from January 20th to May 18th.

According to Lazarsfeld's theory (Lazarsfeld, 1957), the leader is responsible for issuing information of public interest; in addition, he mentions the importance of managing the flow of communication. The presence of the government leader is essential, especially in matters that have to do with the life and health of the inhabitants, in this case of an emergency due to Covid-19.

On the other hand, in the study carried out by Orozco (2020) he maintains that the level of acceptance and rejection of the president's messages varied and that his messages could not transmit the necessary information to the public. With this, it can be highlighted that during the governments of Martín Vizcarra and Francisco Sagasti there was a change in the strategy to get the message to the public, since in the first wave, the presence of the president was consecutive still, the acceptance varied depending on the issues to be discussed; so for the second wave, the interim president was represented by specialists on the subject, which allowed the message to be shared more clearly with the population. This means an essential change since press conferences in a pandemic context are a means of transmitting messages and recommendations to the population (Guibarra and Sánchez, 2020).

Otherwise, it was identified the main topic is discussed during the press conferences is related to the actions and measures of the Executive against the Covid-19 pandemic with 90%, in comparison to 10% corresponding to topics controversies related to the economy, education and transportation. Regarding the study by Orozco (2020), maintains that the messages were filled with irrelevant topics, moreover, that the Government tried to inform everything at all times without paying attention to the needs of the population, and affirms the communication strategies used in the messages didn't undergo variations, which caused the content not to be understood by the population.

This means that during the second wave, the press conferences were able to cover the population's need for information related to Covid-19. Highlighting the importance of recognizing the public agenda, this is understood as the list of issues that the target audience considers highly relevant (Zhu and Blood, 1996). In the second wave, the strategy was quickly adapted since the main characters were related to the topics that were discussed in each press conference, and the agenda that they elaborated can be corroborated to keep the Peruvian population informed about Covid-19.

Besides the communication campaigns carried out by the Government of Peru during the second wave of Covid-19, the aim was established of the campaign "Let's not lower our guard" to inform about biosafety measures to avoid the spread and contagion of Covid-19. Offering advice on handwashing, using a mask, and social distancing, including the "Put my shoulder" campaign, despite being subject to the vaccination process and its importance. Furthermore, according to Macassi (2020), when analyzing three campaigns of the Peruvian Government: "I stay at home", "First my health", "The Covid doesn't kill alone. Let's not be accomplices", argued that they did not have a health strategy, that is, they were preventive and only responded to the increase in infections and deaths. This means that during the mandate of Francisco Sagasti a new strategy was generated in which society is involved, highlighting his role in the fight against Covid-19. Since when a crisis is introduced in a pandemic context, the need for information multiplies, so it is essential to use communication strategies to maintain the fluidity of truthful information and contribute to citizenship education (Názaro et al., 2019). This change

is important because it allowed society to participate and emphasize its responsibility to prevent the spread of infections through protection.

The "Let's not lower our guard" campaign was directed at the entire population, highlighting families with vulnerable members; Furthermore, part of the information was aimed at people who leave their homes for work or shopping. On the other hand, "I put my shoulder" was aimed at older adults and front-line personnel against Covid-19, as they stayed in the first phase of the vaccination process. However, in the campaign "The covid does not kill alone. Let's not be accomplices", established in the first wave after the increase in cases due to family gatherings and parties, counted on the segmentation of a differentiated audience for adolescents, young people, rural sectors and people from the middle / upper class, proposing an advertising that pressured to families, friends and citizens to make them aware of their irresponsible behavior in the face of this pandemic. During the second wave of Covid-19, the aggressive campaign proposed in the first wave was eliminated, establishing a new preventive strategy through the "Let's not lower our guard" campaign and encouraging the population about how important and necessary it is to receive the doses of the vaccine against Covid-19, this through the campaign "I put my shoulder." Mass communication campaigns can produce positive changes or prevent negative changes in behaviors related to people's health (Wakefield et al., 2010).

During the study of the Facebook of the Presidency of Peru, it was evidenced the dissemination of information was divided between the vaccination process (32.9%), care against Covid-19 (28.6%), the Voucher 600 (12.9%), and other activities of the president. While in the study by Soto and Fernández (2020), on Nayib Bukele's communicational strategy on Twitter during the Covid-19 pandemic in El Salvador, it revealed that his publications were divided into the evolution of infections, deaths, and recovered patients from Covid-19; the construction of health centers for the treatment of the pandemic and finally the economic and social containment measures. The president of El Salvador segments the content of his Twitter page to cover information about the health emergency in his country. In Peru, the presidency also followed the strategy of meeting this need, but focuses, to a large extent, on communicating about the vaccination process, since it became the main means of protection to avoid serious risks caused by Covid-19. Digital media have been the most used support to cover the information needs that the population has about Covid-19, and it has been of great help for government entities, since they could analyze the situations that citizens live day by day because of the deadly virus (Lázaro and Herrera, 2020).

Finally, it is important to note that the interaction between the issuer and the users never existed, although many citizens showed their complaints, suggestions or requests on the Facebook page. This same case occurred in the social networks of the Government of Spain, where communication was non-existent except for specific issues; there was no conversation between the state and its followers, who did comment, ask and give their opinions (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2020). This means that in some countries, a strategy has not been implemented in which the relationship of issuer and user exists, even though it is important for the state to communicate with citizens, even in virtuality, since this makes feedback possible. Social networks such as Facebook have allowed new opportunities for political participation, where users come to pay attention to political information, if it is a particular moment of civic enthusiasm, as in the case of the Covid-19 pandemic (Valera et al., 2018).

Conclusion

Press conferences have been one of the main communication strategies and one of the most viable means of communication that have served to inform the Peruvian population, on specific and detailed issues during the second wave of Covid-19, even with a low presence of the President of the Republic, Francisco Sagasti, giving his place in the press conferences to the President of the Council of Ministers Violeta Bermúdez. On the other hand, the topics that are frequently discussed were about the actions and measures of the executive to face the pandemic caused by Covid-19.

During the second wave of Covid-19, the Government implemented different social campaigns to inform and raise awareness in the population about biosecurity care to avoid infections and deaths. This is how the communication campaigns "Let's not lower the guard" and "Put my shoulder" arose, with a health communication strategy, responding to the increase in infections, health measures to reinforce them and involving citizens so that they take into account that they are responsible of the Covid-19 transmission chain, seeking to change people's behavior.

Finally, it is concluded that Facebook is the main social network of the Peruvian Government when it comes to deploying the online communication strategy on the crisis management of Covid-19. The content displayed on Facebook is constant, related to sanitary measures, the vaccination process, the bonus for the benefit of the population, and the president's own political activities. The volume of publications and interactions were different, the population paid more attention to those publications that involve the president or the nation's messages, and those related to the current situation of the pandemic, and information material on sanitary measures were left aside. This is because the information that users needed was not fully nurtured, despite being present in the comments of each publication; that is, feedback was considered part of the strategy put into the government's social network.

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