Measurement and predictors of resilience among Latin American public relations professionals: An application of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC)

Abstract

Purpose: It is well established that greater resilience buffers the negative effects of adverse events and conditions, allowing the affected individual to recover adequately. Resilience is a core trait for public relations practitioners, due to the challenging and pressure-laden nature of their work. However, as an individual-level trait, this phenomenon remains underexplored in the communication field. The current study examines the dimensionality and measurement invariance of the 25-item Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Connor & Davidson, 2003), evaluate the level of resilience, and identify predictors of resilience among Latin American public relations practitioners.

Design: A population of 898 public relations professionals from 18 Latin American countries working on different hierarchical levels, both in communication departments and agencies across the region were surveyed.

Findings: CD-RISC global scorings show direct correlations with age, years of experience, type of organization, hierarchy, and social media skills. However, education, gender, or working in an excellent, successful and influential communication department were not predictors of resilience. Additionally, results provide supporting evidence that the CD-RISC has good psychometric properties and can be used as a reliable and valid tool to assess resilience among Latin American public relations practitioners.

Limitations: As in any study using self-report measures, the results may have been influenced by participants’ acquiescence and need for social desirability. Greater participation is needed from some countries to allow for a more comprehensive comparative analysis.

 *Keywords*: resilience, public relations, Latin America, education

**Introduction**

We are living fascinating times. The deep and transformative changes that have impacted societies in the last decades have occurred at an unprecedented speed. Diverse concepts devised to explain contemporary societies –liquidity, uncertainty; hypermodernity; dyssynchrony – underscore adaptation as an essential feature of our times. In this post factual society, public relations practitioners have to deal with increasing adversities, crisis, and conflicts, requiring them to be resilient. In this context of ongoing changes, communication professionals can feel vertigo for the growing requirement of continuous improvement. As knowledge workers, they are deeply affected by the economic, cultural and technological revolution. The rapidly evolving job market also requires new individual and environmental resources that facilitate positive adaptation to adversities. Significant changes in the current work environment are likely to make it even harder in the future.

Research on the concept of resilience has gained substantial momentum over the past decades and has become a multidisciplinary field of research spanning a variety of theoretical and conceptual positions (Wilson, 2018). Previous studies have used a number of constructed psychometric scales to capture this construct, including the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC; Connor & Davidson, 2003), shown resilience to be positively correlated with greater social engagement, higher optimism, and functional independence (Hardy, Concato, & Gill, 2004; Lamond et al., 2008; Wagnild, 2003; Wells, 2009). However, practitioner resilience has not formally addressed in the public relations research, with the sole exception of the qualitative research conducted by Gou and Anderson (2018) using a critical incident technique approach.

Despite the increasing use of the CD-RISC in resilience research, no studies have analyzed the psychometric properties of this measure in the public relations field. Broadly, an examination of the factorial validity of the CD-RISC in a context not previously studied has implications for the robustness of the resilient qualities it assesses. In addition to the analysis of the factorial structure, this paper evaluates the level of resilience and identify predictors of resilience among Latin American public relations practitioners. Resilience, as a multi-dimensional variable, changes in different populations with diverse living conditions, cultural background, context, time, age, and life circumstances (Connor Davidson, & Lee, 2003; Masten, 1994; Wagnild, 2003; Werner, 1993). Therefore, the purpose of this study is twofold: (1) to evaluate psychometric properties of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale with the aim of determining whether it can be used as a reliable tool to assess public relations practitioners’ resilience, and (2) to investigate how different sociodemographic and work-related variables influence their level of resilience.

**Literature review**

**The concept of resilience**

Resilience is a contested, ambiguous and complex term, routed in biology and natural science disciplines, that incorporates the idea of bouncing back, reintegration, and/or adaptation after a major disruption or adversity (Buzzanell, 2010; Guo & Anderson, 2018). The range as to what “qualifies” as a disruption creates a broad landscape for potential contexts to study this construct (Ford, 2018). For the purpose of this research, we rely on the definition by Stewart, Reid, and Mangham (1997: 22), who described it as “the capability of individuals to cope successfully in the face of change, adversity, and risk”, an ability that can be developed and enhanced (Kossek & Perrigino, 2016).

The idea of resilience has been adopted and expanded over the past 40 years in the social sciences (Annarelli & Nonino, 2016; Block & Block, 1980; Rutter, 1987). From an individual approach, resilience protects individuals from the psychological damage associated with adversity and increases the likelihood that they will resolve challenging situations adequately (Block & Kremen, 1996). According to Pangallo, Zibarras, Lewis, and Flaxman (2015), all the 17 resilience measures developed for use in adults conceptualize resilience as either a: process, trait, state, or outcome. The process models focus on the internal and external resources used to foster positive adaptation to adversity (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007; Friborg, Hjemdal, Rosenvinge, & Martinussen, 2003; Kumpfer, 1999). The trait models operationalize resilience as a set of internal characteristics (Block & Kremen, 1996; Maddi et al., 2006), while the state approach proposes that positive psychology constructs (hope, optimism, and self-efficacy) are pathways to resilience, which together form a state-like construct (Luthans, Vogelgesang, & Lester, 2006). Finally, resilience as an outcome variable refers to the ability to “bounce back” from physical and psychological stressors (Sinclair & Wallston, 2004). However, and despite the use of different theoretical frameworks, it is widely accepted that resilience is best defined as a process characterized by a complex interaction of internal and external resources moderated by developmental influences (Pangallo et al., 2015).

Researchers emphasize that resilience contains self-regulatory functions that serve to buffer the negative effects of an undesirable environment, allowing the affected individual the time, energy, and resource investment to recover, rebound, and return to an equilibrium point (Buckner, Mezzacappa, & Beardslee, 2003; Gardner, Dishion, & Connell, 2008). Thus, a challenge for resilience research is to develop a theoretical model which could differentiate factors and mechanisms promoting resilience (Davydov, Stewart, Ritchie, & Chaudieu, 2010).

Numerous studies have tested the influence of genetic, biological, psychological, family, community, social, and environmental determinants (Cameron, Ungar, & Liebenberg, 2007; Norris, Stevesn, Pfefferbaum, Wyche, & Pfefferbaum, 2008). For example, Dweck (2006) discovered that people with growth mindsets are considered to be more resilient, more willing to try something new, and more likely to grow their abilities. In the same vein, empirical studies have shown that perceived resilience has a negative association with stress-related anxiety (Krush & Agnihotri, 2013) and emotional exhaustion (Bande, Fernandez-Ferrín, Varela, & Jaramillo, 2015).

Even if previous research presents a notable absence of sociocontextual and demographic predictors of resilience, it is well known that these variables may exert a cumulative influence (Pangallo et al., 2015). More specifically, age, gender, years of experience and education have been identified as influencing coping and stress management in various contexts (Adali & Priami, 2002; Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007; Moore, Kuhik, and Katz, 1996; Shields & Ward, 2001). Additionally, studies conducted in a workplace setting suggest that executives and professionals with more years of experience have significantly higher resilience scores (Mallak & Yildiz, 2016). On the other hand, the latest edition of the European Communication Monitor (ECM) (Zerfass, Tench, Verhoeven, Verčič, & Moreno, 2018) shows that heads of communication departments and consultancies feel more engaged and better equipped to handle stress than team members, and so do team leaders. Moreover, practitioners working on governmental organizations are less satisfied with their job than those of the private sector.

On the other hand, work engagement and resilience have been linked to job resources and professional skills (Skovholt, Grier, & Hanson, 2001). Nowadays, excellent practitioners are expected to possess the technical skills to manage the complex and dynamic context and functions of their organizations. However, technology and digital communication platforms has blurred the boundaries between work and life, negatively affecting the job satisfaction level over the last years. As the new media continues to evolve and spread throughout society, practitioners that are unprepared for social media challenges are likely to face a number of professional barriers and higher levels of stress at work (Moreno, Navarro, Tench, & Zerfass, 2015; Zerfass, Sandhu, & Young, 2007). Consequently, professionals managing the online channels are less satisfied at work (Zerfass et al., 2018).

Evidence suggests that supportive environments are strongly associated with physical and mental health and improved productivity. Existing literature highlights the role of organizational context for the evolution of employee resilience (Cooper, Liu, & Tarba, 2014). Importantly, professionals working in excellent departments (20.2 per cent) have less serious stress problems and are more satisfied with their jobs (93.5 per cent), in contrast to their peers in other departments (30.5 and 66.8 per cent) (Zerfass et al., 2018).

**Research on resilience in Public Relations**

Public relations professionals play a central role as boundary spanners, community facilitators, sense givers, and change-management agents, helping organizations to embrace uncertainty and create new opportunities (Tench, Verčič, Zerfass, Moreno, & Verhoeven, 2017). Practitioners work across organizations and communities, scanning the environment, dealing with stakeholders’ needs and expectations, facing ethical dilemmas, managing crisis, and navigating conflicting interests that trigger work-related frustrations and dissatisfaction (Bowen, 2004; Erzikova & Berger, 2012; Guo & Anderson, 2018; Parsons, 2016). Based on data from the ECM studies (Tench et al., 2017), an ideal practitioner should be able to manage the complex, dynamic context and functions of their organization as they will possess the cognitive, technical, social and communication skills to gain the confidence of colleagues from other sectors and functions. However, almost every third public relations practitioners in Europe want to leave his current employer, less than half think that they have a good work-life balance and just a 38.1 per cent are happy with their career opportunities (Zerfass et al., 2018). The most important drivers of work stress are the need to be constantly available outside working time to access emails and phone calls, too heavy a work load, as well as information overload.

The latest report of the Commission on Public Relation Education underlines this changing fast-forward context of the profession and their implications for education. The results of a survey conducted among 105 public relations employers or hirers highlight resilience as one of the desired entry-level employees’ personal traits. Other related characteristics mentioned were nimbleness, adaptability, flexibility, agility, and being able to juggle multiple projects without getting overwhelmed or frustrated (CPRE, 2018).

Communication scholars and practitioners have recently shown a growing interest in this topic, seeking to understand how dyadic, group, organizational, or mass communication processes facilitate the development or maintenance of resilience (Carlson, 2018). Central to this shift is the conceptualization of resilience as a communicative construction that hinges on five processes: crafting normalcy; maintaining and using communication networks; putting alternative logics to work; legitimizing negative feelings while foregrounding productive action; and affirming identity anchors (Buzzanell, 2010).

However, limited attention has been paid to the concept of resilience in the communication management field from an individual approach, but it may be crucial due to the micro (individual), meso (organizational), and macro (societal) effect of public relations work. This field provides an intriguing context to study resilience because practitioners are regularly engaged in work that may require the ability to “bounce back” from challenging work (Coutu, 2002).

In a recent attempt to fill this gap, Guo and Anderson (2018) conducted a qualitative exploratory study and identified workplace adversities that are unique to public relations practitioners, such as marginalization, misunderstanding by the C-Suite, and managing cultural shifts during organizational changes. This pioneer work also found four paths to resilience: disengage and bounce forward, persevere and bounce up, risk and bounce back, and finally, struggle and bounce around. The differences among the four paths seem to lie, according to the authors, in individual attributes, perceived workplace environment, and sensemaking patterns.

**Public Relations in Latin America**

Public relations in Latin America began to develop following the gradual introduction of democracy, and the liberalization of the news media system in the early 1970s (Mellado & Barría, 2012; Sharpe & Simoes, 1996). During the last two decades, PR scholars have shown a greater interest in this region as a result of the improved economic situation, the effects of globalization and the strengthening of media systems in many countries. Numerous articles (e.g., De Brooks, Penaloza, & Waymer, 2009; Mellado & Barría, 2012; Molleda, Athaydes, & Hirsch, 2003; Molleda, Moreno, & Navarro, 2017; Molleda & Moreno, 2008; Molleda, Moreno, Athaydes & Suárez, 2010) have contributed to widening the knowledge of the regional industry, with the Latin American Communication Monitor as a flagship research project in the continent. However, public relations field in Latin America remains largely unexplored.

If the study of resilience is key to identify and evaluate the internal and external resources used to foster positive adaptation to adversity, the Latin American context is particularly interesting due to the harsh economic, political and social conditions (Molleda, 2001). This paper focuses on two research questions and eight hypotheses derived from a literature review:

RQ1: What is the factorial structure of the CD-RISC scale in a public relations population of Latin America?

H1a. The reliability of the total CD-RISC scale is expected to be good as previous studies have shown

H1.b. The factorial structure will be organized into five factors as in the original (Connor & Davidson, 2003).

RQ2: What demographic, socioeconomic, and work-related variables influence the resilience of public relations practitioners in Latin America?

H2a. Higher education correlates positively with resilience

H2b. Older individuals will present higher levels of resilience.

H2c. Individuals working on leadership positions present higher levels of resilience.

H2d. The level of seniority correlate positively with resilience.

H2e. Better social media skills correlates positively with resilience

H2f. Practitioners working in excellent communication departments show higher levels of resilience.

H2g. Public Relations professionals working in the public sector will present lower levels of resilience.

**Method**

**Participants**

A total of 898 public relations professionals participated in the study. Participants were drawn from all levels of seniority: 33.7% reporting a position of communication manager or as CEO of a communication consultancy, 26.3% responsible for a single communication discipline or as unit leaders, and 38.3% listing their role as team members or consultants. Nearly 67% of respondents were female, the mean age of all participants was 39.8 years old (SD = 11.66), and the mean years of working experience was 14.83 (SD = 11.06). Sixty-seven percent of participants work in the communication department of their organizations. In total, 32.6% reported working for an agency, consultant firm, or as a freelance practitioner. Impressively, 97.7% of respondents have an academic degree, and half of which also hold a graduate degree (6.3% holds a doctorate).

**Survey and data collection**

The research is based on a quantitative survey among communication professionals working companies, governmental organizations, and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) in Latin America. The data used for the study was gathered using an online survey designed in Qualtrics. The questionnaire was active from May to August of 2016 and was available in both Spanish and Portuguese. It was pre-tested with 39 communication professionals in eight Latin American countries. More than 20,000 personal invitations were sent to communication professionals working in 19 Latin American countries via email, with three reminders. Assistance in the data collection came from a developed network of colleagues and a database of international communication professionals from trade associations. In total, 2,295 professionals started the survey and 946 of them completed. The data analysis and results excluded those participants who could not clearly be identified as part of the study population. Responses from participants that could not be clearly identified as part of the population were deleted from the data set. This strict selection of respondents set this study apart from other works that were based on snowball sampling or included students, academics, and people outside of the focused profession or region. The final evaluation is then based on the completed responses of 898 public relations professionals.

Of the 19 countries invited to participate in the study, professionals from 17 countries responded the questionnaire, and nine of them met the minimum number of observations required by the researchers: Argentina (N = 110), Brazil (N = 174), Chile (N = 95), Colombia (N = 142), Costa Rica (N = 50), Mexico (N = 96), Peru (N = 64), Dominican Republic (N = 63), and Venezuela (N = 53).

**Instrumentation**

**Resilience**. This study uses the scale developed by Connor and Davidson in 2003 as a single valid measure of resilience in adulthood. The scale contains 25 items, all of which carry a 5-point range of responses, as follows: not true at all (0), rarely true (1), sometimes true (2), often true (3), and true nearly all of the time (4), with higher ratings indicating greater resilience. The CD-RISC is a multidimensional intended to assess “the personal qualities that enable an individual to thrive in the face of adversity” (Connor & Davisson, 2003: 76), and focuses on the internal resources necessary to adapt positively, such as a strong sense of purpose, trust in one’s instincts, spiritual faith, the ability to cope with negative emotions, a sense of humor, and an action-oriented approach to problem solving (Goldstein, Faulkner, & Werkele, 2013; Singh & Yu, 2010).

The CD-RISC has been used to measure resilience in multiple populations, including graduate students (Singh & Yu, 2010), young adults (Burns & Anstey, 2010), older adults (MacLeod, Musich, Hawkins, Alsgaard, & Wicker, 2016), athletes (Gucciardi, Jackso, Coulter, & Mallett, 2013), entrepreneurs (Manzano-García & Calvo, 2013), firefighters (Lee, Ahn, Jeong, Chae, & Choi, 2014), physicians (Sood, Prasad, Schroeder, & Varkey, 2011), nurses (Gillespie, Chaboyer, & Walli, 2007), etc. Nevertheless, we are unaware of any study that has used this instrument with a sample of public relations practitioners.

Utilized in different samples and age groups (Burns & Anstey, 2010; Liu, Fairweather-Schmidt, Burns, & Roberts, 2014; Roy, Sarchiapone, & Carli, 2007), the CD-RISC has good psychometric properties (Connor & Davidson, 2003), with convergent and discriminant validity supported (Campbell-Sills, Cohan, & Stein, 2006; Windle, Bennett, & Noyes, 2011). However, diverse studies have revealed a range of different factor structures. Numerous alternative versions of the CD-RISC, using fewer items, have been proposed in the literature. These include a three-factor solution among South African adolescents (Jorgensen & Sabaat, 2008), a two-factor solution among U.S. veterans (Green et al., 2014), a four-factor solution among adult women over age 60 (Lamond et al, 2008), a three-factor Chinese version (Yu & Zhang., 2007), and a three-factor Turkish version (Karairmak, 2010). Several studies have compared the five-factor measure with unidimensional versions of the CD-RISC with favorable results, including a 22-item unidimensional version of the CD-RISC validated among young adults in Australia (Burns & Anstey, 2010), and a unidimensional 10-item measure validated among American undergraduates (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007).Therefore, the first objective of this study is to evaluate the psychometric properties of the Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) with the aim of determining whether it can be used as a reliable and valid tool to assess public relations professionals’ resilience.

**Excellence, influence and success**. Excellent communication departments were identified with the comparative excellence framework (Zerfass et al., 2014), which combines conceptual considerations with self-assessments of communication professionals and statistical analyses (Verčič & Zerfass, 2016). Excellence is based on the internal standing of the communication department within the organization (influence) and external results of the communication department’s activities, as well as its basic qualifications (performance). Each of these two components was calculated on the basis of four dimensions: the first on advisory influence (where senior managers take the communications recommendations seriously) and executive influence (where communication will likely become a part of senior-level meetings dealing with organizational strategic planning), and the second on overall communication success (where the communication of the organization is successful) and department competence (where the quality of the communication department is better compared to those of competing organizations). Only organizations clearly outperforming in all four dimensions (values 6 or 7 on a seven-point Likert scale) were considered as excellent in the benchmark exercise.

**Social media skills.** Coping with the digital evolution has been consistently one of the key challenges for communication management over the past ten years (Zerfass et al., 2016). Recently, new issues related to the digitalization and the social web have emerged, such as matching the need to address more audiences and channels with limited resources, dealing with the rising flow of information, more transparency and active audiences, and using big data. The survey tracked the level of social media skills among communication professionals, aiming to explore its effect on resilience. Participants were asked to rate their personal capabilities using a 5-point scale in areas related to the use of social media channels, such as delivering messages via social media, developing social media strategies, managing online communities or setting up social media platforms. Based on the answers, we divided the sample population in five categories ranging from very low to very high developed social media skills.

**Sociodemographic and work-related information**: Sociodemographic and work-related variables were collected from participants. The sociodemographic variables of Latin American practitioners included age, gender, educational level, and country of employment. Work-related information included, salary, job experience, type of organization, and hierarchy level.

**Data Analysis**

All statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS. Descriptive statistics were presented as means and standard deviations for continuous variables, and frequencies and proportions for categorical variables. Significance for all statistical tests was set at 0.05 or less (2-tailed). An exploratory analysis was conducted to identify underlying factor structure of the original CD-RISC. In accordance with Kaiser’s rule, principal components with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were selected for oblique (direct oblimin) rotation. Oblique rotation is preferable when the construct under exploration is expected to have dimensions (factors) that relate to each other. Exploratory factor analysis yielded four factors accounting for 50.7% of the variance of the scale. Cronbach’s alpha coefficient was used to assess internal consistency for each factor and for the whole scale.

A series of Pearson’s product–moment correlations were performed, which examined the relationship between personal and work-related characteristics (age, years of experience, salary, hierarchy, type of organization, education, influence, success and excellence), and resilience (CD-RISC) for Latin American public relations practitioners. The next stage of analysis used a standard multiple regression analysis. A probability of less than 0.05 was set for statistical significance.

**Findings**

**Factor structure and reliability**

Results did not support the factorial structure of the original or the CD-RISC, but the exploratory factor analysis results revealed a four-factor model that seemed to fit. The analysis was performed on the matrix of polychoric correlations, reflecting the ordinal nature of the input data. The adequacy of the data was confirmed by Bartlett’s test of sphericity (*df* =275, *p* <0.001), the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) index (.95) and the determinant of the matrix (*p* <0.001).

The four factors accounted for 34.8, 7.02. 4.8 and 4.1% of the total variance, respectively, with eigenvalues of 10.2. 1.5, 1.2 and 1.1 and the factor loadings of all items greater than 0.4 (Table 1). Oblique rotation was calculated using this four-factor solution, and the resulting factors were named goal orientation and tenacity (items 1, 2, 10, 11 and 21-25), personal control and hardiness (14-19), tolerance for negative affect and adaptability (4, 7, 8, 12 and 13), and intuition/spiritual orientation (3, 5, 6, 9 and 20). Internal consistency was evaluated by Cronbach’s alpha, with a value of 0.89, which is considered satisfactory (Bland & Altman, 1997). Item-total correlation coefficients ranged from 0.38 to 0.64 (median = 0.50). The item with the highest mean score (i.e., highest level of agreement with the statement) was “Pride in my achievements” (M=3.63. *SD* = 0.65), whereas the lowest mean score was on the item “Sometimes fate and God can help” (M=2.1. *SD*=1.32) (Table 2).

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item No. |  Factor 1 goal orientation and tenacity | Factor 2 personal control and hardiness | Factor 3 tolerance for negative affect and adaptability | Factor 4 intuition/ spiritual orientation |
| 25 | 0.75 |  |  |  |
| 11 | 0.68 |  |  |  |
| 24 | 0.67 |  |  |  |
| 23 | 0.62 |  |  |  |
| 22 | 0.57 |  |  |  |
| 21 | 0.55 |  |  |  |
| 2 | 0.49 |  |  |  |
| 1 | 0.45 |  |  |  |
| 10 | 0.42 |  |  |  |
| 19 |  | 0.71 |  |  |
| 18 |  | 0.71 |  |  |
| 17 |  | 0.58 |  |  |
| 16 |  | 0.53 |  |  |
| 15 |  | 0.48 |  |  |
| 14 |  | 0.47 |  |  |
| 7 |  |  | 0.60 |  |
| 4 |  |  | 0.51 |  |
| 8 |  |  | 0.46 |  |
| 12 |  |  | 0.45 |  |
| 13 |  |  | 0.44 |  |
| 9 |  |  |  | 0.72 |
| 3 |  |  |  | 0.67 |
| 20 |  |  |  | 0.62 |
| 6 |  |  |  | 0.50 |
| 5 |  |  |  | 0.42 |
| Eigenvalue | 8.70 | 1.75 | 1.22 | 1.03 |
| Variance |  |  |  |  |
| explained | 34.82 | 7.02 | 4.88 | 4.14 |

Table I. Exploratory factor analysis of CD RISC in Latin American public relations practitioners

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Item No. | Abbreviated item | Mean | SD | Item-total correlation |  |
| 1 | Able to adapt to change | 3.52 | 0.661 | 0.40 |  |
| 2 | Close and secure relationships | 3.34 | 0.741 | 0.39 |  |
| 3 | Sometimes fate and God can help | 2.05 | 1.341 | 0.5 |  |
| 4 | Can deal with whatever comes | 3.11 | 0.877 | 0.51 |  |
| 5 | Past success gives confidence for new challenge | 3.24 | 0.821 | 0.40 |  |
| 6 | See the humorous side of things | 2.56 | 1.111 | 0.55 |  |
| 7 | Coping with stress make stronger | 3.06 | 0.856 | 0.54 |  |
| 8 | Tend to bounce back after illness, injury or hardship | 3.26 | 0.862 | 0.45 |  |
| 9 | Things happen for a reason | 2.6 | 1.221 | 0.57 |  |
| 10 | Best effort no matter what | 3.09 | 0.983 | 0.38 |  |
| 11 | One can achieve one’s goals | 3.56 | 0.691 | 0.53 |  |
| 12 | When things look hopeless, I do not give up | 3.06 | 1.044 | 0.46 |  |
| 13 | Know where to get help | 3.18 | 0.848 | 0.46 |  |
| 14 | Under pressure, focus and think clearly | 3.14 | 0.843 | 0.48 |  |
| 15 | Prefer to take the lead in problem solving | 3.34 | 0.763 | 0.51 |  |
| 16 | Not easily discouraged by failure | 3.03 | 0.947 | 0.52 |  |
| 17 | Think of self as strong person | 3.32 | 0.772 | 0.48 |  |
| 18 | Make unpopular or difficult decisions | 2.62 | 1.043 | 0.59 |  |
| 19 | Can handle unpleasant feelings | 2.82 | 0.959 | 0.59 |  |
| 20 | Have to act on a hunch, without knowing why | 2.35 | 1.086 | 0.64 |  |
| 21 | Strong sense of purpose in life | 3.27 | 0.812 | 0.52 |  |
| 22 | In control of my life | 2.95 | 0.931 | 0.49 |  |
| 23 | I like challenge | 3.5 | 0.679 | 0.51 |  |
| 24 | One works to attain one’s goals | 3.5 | 0.743 | 0.55 |  |
| 25 | Pride in my achievements | 3.64 | 0.648 | 0.60 |  |

Table II. Descriptive statistics deviations (SD)] and item-total correlation for the CD- RISC items in the current study

**Effects of sociodemographic and work-related variables on resilience**

Table 3 shows resilience scores according to sociodemographic and work-related variables. The mean total score on the CD-RISC in our sample was 77.11 (*SD* =22.28). Age, position, job experience, type of organization, and social media skills presented statistically significant differences in the level of resilience. Professionals who were 30 years old or younger reported a lower level of resilience (*p* ≤0.001, *t* (898) = 1.542). The mean resilience score for practitioners in a position of power was 78.47, which was significantly higher than the score for those working as a team members or consultants (*p* ≤0.05, t (898) = 1.317). Participants with more seniority have higher level of resilience than those with less job experience (*p* ≤0.001, t (898) = 1.552). On the contrary, practitioners working in Government-owned, the public sector or political organization presented lower levels resilience. CD-RISC scores did not show statistically significant positive correlation with gender, education, working in successful, influent and excellent communication departments *(p ≤* 0.05*).*

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Variables | Mean | SD | *t*/*F* | *p* |
| *Gender*Female | 77.13 | 22.37 | 1.065 | 0.324 |
| Male*Age*18 to 29 | 77.0575.67 | 22.0722.99 | 1.542 | 0.001 |
| 30 to 39 | 77.28 | 22.39 |  |  |
| 40 to 49 | 77.36 | 21.86 |  |  |
| 50 to 59 | 78.03 | 21.79 |  |  |
| More than 60 years old | 78.32 | 20.19 |  |  |
| *Position*Head of communication, agency CEO | 78.27 | 21.37 | 1.317 | 0.03 |
| Responsible for single communication discipline, unit leader | 78.60 | 22.09 |  |  |
| Team member, consultant | 75.44 | 22.81 |  |  |
| *Education*No university degree | 75.28 | 22.43 | 1.212 | 0.091 |
| Bachelor’s degree | 76.64 | 22.87 |  |  |
| Master’s degree | 77.54 | 21.90 |  |  |
| Doctorate (PhD, Dr) | 77.06 | 21.50 |  |  |
| *Excellence*Working in excellent communication departments | 82.08 | 22.57 | 31.732 | 0.84 |
| Working in non-excellent communication departments | 76.26 | 22.17 |  |  |
| *Influence*Influence in the communication function | 79.57 | 21.22 | 1.001 | 0.484 |
| No influence in the communication function | 75.60 | 22.41 |  |  |
| *Success*Success in the communication function | 79.56 | 21.38 | 0.936 | 0.649 |
| No success in the communication function | 76.18 | 22.22 |  |  |
| *Job experience*Up to 5 years | 76.20 | 22.70 | 1.552 | 0.001 |
| 6 to 10 years | 76.98 | 22.29 |  |  |
| More than 10 years | 77.78 | 21.87 |  |  |
| *Organization*Join stock company | 77.13 | 22.10 | 1.261 | 0.05 |
| Private company | 76.84 | 22.37 |  |  |
| Government-owned, public sector, political organization | 76.66 | 22.45 |  |  |
| Non-profit organization, association | 78.92 | 21.20 |  |  |
| Communication consultancy, PR agency, | 77.24 | 22.77 |  |  |
| Freelance consultant | 76.91 | 21.45 |  |  |
| *Social media skills*Very low development of social media skills | 73.84 | 23.34 | 1.351 | 0.018 |
| Low development of social media skills | 74.23 | 23.47 |  |  |
| Moderate development of social media skills | 76.41 | 22.04 |  |  |
| High development of social media skills | 79.47 | 20.76 |  |  |
| Very high development of social media skills | 84.85 | 19.66 |  |  |

Table III. Mean scores of resilience according to demographic and work-related variables

**Associations between predictors and resilience**

Bivariate analyses were conducted to examine the associations between predictors and resilience,

consisting of demographic and work-related variables. For the categorical variables, we created dummy variables. Higher level of social media skills were the only predictors of resilience for this group of public relations practitioners.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Unstandardized coefficients SE Standardized coefficients *t*a | *pb* |
| Constant | 2.023 | 0.072 |  | 28.004 | 0 |
| Job experience | 0.007 | 0.016 | 0.021 | 0.463 | 0.643 |
| Age | −0.001 | 0.001 | −0.037 | −0.824 | 0.41 |
| Position | 0.007 | 0.013 | 0.02 | 0.509 | 0.611 |
| Organization | −0.009 | 0.007 | −0.046 | −1.269 | 0.205 |
| Social media skills | −0.025 | 0.012 | −0.071 | −1.972 | 0.049 |

Table IV. Multiple regression analysis of predictors of resilience

**Discussion and conclusion**

Resilience is a process that unfolds over a person’s career, involving an interaction between characteristics of the individual and the workplace context. It becomes especially relevant when professionals are faced with change, adversity, and/or disruptions (Gu & Day, 2013). Research on this topic have found that highly resilient individuals are able to anticipate positive outcomes under adverse conditions, visualize work demands as challenges to be overcome, with confidence in their ability to succeed (Britt & Jex, 2015). Personality facets, coping mechanisms, and social support structures all influence one’s level of resilience (Smith, Emerson, Haight, Mauldin, & Wood, 2019). The general objective of this study was to explore Latin American public relations practitioners’ level of resilience, measure the effect of sociodemographic and work-related variables, and to examine psychometric properties of the CD-RISC in the public relations field.

The average scale CD-RISC score reported in the current study was reasonably high (M = 77.11, *SD* =22.28), higher than previous research conducted in Hong Kong (M = 59.99, SD = 13.92), Korea (M = 61.2, SD = 13), or China (M = 63.4, SD = 13.1), but somewhat lower than Connor and Davidson’s (2003) sample of the general population (M =80.4, *SD*=12.8). The scale demonstrated good internal consistency (Cronbach’s apha = 0.89) and the weights in factor analysis were within the range of 0.38-0.64 in our study and within the range of 0.30-0.70 in the original (Connor & Davidson, 2003). The reliability coefficient in the Latin American context of the CD-RISC was 0.89, consistent with Connor and Davidson’s study (á=0.89), Singh and Yu (á=0.89) and also Lamond et al. (2008), who observed á= 0.92. Thus, hypothesis 1a is supported.

Consistent with this study, prior research has found strong psychometric properties for the instrument, but the original factor structure (Connor & Davidson, 2003) was not obtained. We found that a 4-factor structure of the CD-RISC showed the best goodness of fit in the present study sample compared with the original 5-factor. Therefore, Hypothesis 1b is not confirmed. Factor 1 occupies the majority of the explained variance of the present 4-factor structure. It extracts all items from the original 5-factor (factor 1, 3 and 4). This factor reflects that employees with higher psychological resilience integrate behaviors of goal orientation when facing adversity and frustration. Factor 2 extracts all items from the original version factors 1 and 2, and reflects personal control and hardiness. It suggests that resilient public relations practitioners are subjects who possess skills that enable them to handle adverse situations and feel that they have control over their lives. Factor 3 reflects tolerance for negative affect and adaptability. This is a fundamental factor because it not only contains the meaning of striving against difficult situations, but also reflects the basic meaning of resilience and positive psychology. Factor 4 refers quite a mixture of the original 5-factor structure. This indicates the potential role of instinct and spirituality among the employees in dealing with challenges. This factor, which did not emerge in other studies conducted in Spain (Manzano-García & Calvo, 2013), China (Yu & Zhang, 2007) or Australia (Burns & Ansley, 2010), can be related to the high level of religious commitment observed in Latin America. With the sole exception of Uruguay, where population show a lower level of spirituality, the share of adults who consider religion to be very important in their lives rang from 90% in Honduras, to 41% in Chile (Pew Research Center, 2018). As suggested by Jogersen and Seedat (2008), Manzano-García and Calvo (2013) or Baek, Lee, Joo, and Choi (2010), the different factorial structure could be reflecting cultural differences in the meaning of resilience as a construct. The sampling techniques could also explain the difficulties on reproducing the structure of five factors proposed by Connor and Davidson (2003).

Public relations practitioners should have in-built innate or developed mechanisms able to recognize and neutralize adversities and their related effects (Davydov et al., 2010). In terms of sociodemographic and work-related variables, age years of experience, and hierarchy have a significant correlation with the CD-RISC total score. These findings are consistent with previous research on the positive relationship between employees age, years of experience, leadership position, and resilience (e.g. Carson & Bedeian, 1994; London, 1993; Marchant et al., 2009). Older workers are expected to possess higher job-related skills and self-management resources, developed over time, enabling them to apply more active coping strategies when faced with demanding job situations (Hertel, Rauschenbach, Thielgen, & Krumm, 2015). However, further research is needed to determine whether these age differences reflect real strengths of older workers or whether these differences simply occur because older workers have less stressful jobs than their younger colleagues. Hypotheses H2b, H2c, H2d are supported.

The results did not show established empirical association between education and resilience; nevertheless, previous research indicated that education level enhanced employees’ ability to effectively manage stress in the workplace (Adali & Priami, 2002; Cabrera-García, Casas, Pardo, & Rodríguez, 2017). In these studies, it appeared that education augmented practitioners’ ability to use problem-solving strategies. In the current investigation, the positive correlations between resilience and education was only weak and not significant. Hypothesis H2a is not supported. On the other hand, our findings corroborate previous studies about the negative effect of gender in the level of resilience (De la Fuente, Cardelle-Elawar, Martínez-Vicente, Zapata, & Peralta, 2013; Gonzalez-Torres & Artuch, 2014; McLafferty, Mallet, & McCauley, 2012).

The literature has found that technical skills also play a role in career resilience (Brunetti, 2006; Gu & Day, 2007; Mansfield, Beltman, Price, & McConney, 2012). The results of the current study confirm that PR practitioners reporting stronger social media skills have higher levels of resilience, proving that a resilience outcome will be more likely when people have the resource base for dealing with the demands they face. This finding is also compatible with earlier studies, which indicate an association between social media use, self-efficacy, and both personal and group resilience (Sigalit, Sivia, & Michal, 2017; Tower, Latimer, & Hewitt, 2014). Furthermore, in the face of an adverse work environment, individuals who believe that they are resilient are likely to perceive that they have sufficient resources for dealing with the adversity (Kimura, Bande, & Fernández-Ferrín, 2018). Hypothesis H2e is supported.

Although organizational contexts have a profound impact in the evolution of employee resilience, little research has been done to investigate employee resilience in different organizational contexts. The ECM introduced in 2014 the Comparative Excellence Framework for Communication Management, based on self-assessment and inspired by business excellence models (Verčič & Zerfass, 2016), to identify the characteristics of excellent communication departments. According the 2018 survey (Zerfass et al., 2018), communication practitioners working in excellent departments show higher levels of work engagement and trust their organization to a far higher extent. Surprisingly, in the current study resilience did not correlate with working in excellent departments or having perceived influence or success. Such finding does not confirm the reciprocity between individuals and their environments highlighted in prior research (Gillespie et al., 2009; Jeong et al., 2015). Consequently, the results suggest that resilience may be constrained on an individual’s characteristics., Mallet, & McCauley, 2012). Thus, hypothesis H2f is rejected.

Finally, public relations practitioners working in the public sector present lower levels of resilience, confirming the hypothesis H2g. This finding can be related with the traditional lack of goal specificity, agility, career development and flexibility, alongside with hierarchical authority, negative influencing governmental organizations (Kjeldsen & Hansen, 2018). Burnout and exhaustion increase specially with tenure in the public sector (Bright, 2008).

This is the first empirical study that operationalizes the dimensions of resilience in a sample of public relations practitioners. Resilience offers information about how professionals face stressful situations and uncertainty, and how this can impact both on their mental health as on the organizational success. For that reason, it can be useful to have a valid and reliable measure of resilience. In this respect, our findings provide supporting evidence that the CD-RISC has good psychometric properties and can be used as a reliable and valid tool to assess resilience among Latin American public relations practitioners.

**Practical Implications**

 Research results shed a light on the relevance of resilience for communication management practitioners in today’s context of extremely changing societies and heavier workloads. The resilience of the workforce has not been so far a major consideration in human resources planning yet it may significantly impact the trajectory and longevity of a PR professional’s career. Identifying factors that protect against negative outcomes is important for the development of strengths-based approaches that emphasize resilience. It is important to assist PR practitioners to develop skills that will aid them in being more resilient and better able to cope with and protect themselves from the effects of workplace adversity. Moreover, in predicting the ability to tolerate stress and its negative effects, this study may help in the selection of personnel who will manage tougher job demands. Hiring employees with strong resilience could possibly reduce turnover rate and enhance work engagement. Additionally, our analyses suggest the need of educating and training resilience as an important competence for communication professionals. As previously stated, resilience can be developed and strengthened through strategies aimed at reducing vulnerability to stressors and managing the impact of adversity in the workplace. Promoting the value that resilience is a necessity and a core component of professionalism, an attitudinal change among the body of PR practitioners may well influence future organizational structures and policies. In addition, when establishing the development of specific competences for communication practitioners, it is crucial to consider the use and understanding of technological skills, specially addressed to social media management. To conclude, resilience training has been proven to have a number of wider benefits that include enhanced psychosocial functioning, mental health, and improved performance

**Limitations and Future Research**

The study is pioneer in the evaluation of resilience competence in the communication field. However, it has several limitations that require consideration when interpreting the findings. First, a large sample of professionals was approached, but a much small number initiated and completed the online survey. This resulted in the lack of representation of some countries in the continent. In the future, greater participation is needed to allow for a more comprehensive comparative analysis. Second, this study just explored the influence of individual-level factors on resilience. Future studies can be conducted to investigate the effect of both individual- and organizational level factors on resilience for public relations practitioners. Third, this study used a quantitative methodology, which can provide limited information about resilience, and further qualitative research is necessary to explore the meaning of resilience and identify contributors and inhibitors of resilience. Fourth, as in any study using self-report measures, the results may have been influenced by participants’ acquiescence and need for social desirability. Fifth, the scale was developed originally in clinical settings. Consequently, the generalization to work settings is not clear. The present study has provided more evidence of the need for cross-cultural comparison of an imported construct and its measurement by showing that the resilience construct, defined by the CD-RISC (Connor & Davidson 2003), may be understood differently in other cultures.

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