



ClosingGap: Driving social change in gender equality

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the ClosinGap association as a business platform that promotes social change, particularly in advancing Spanish companies' commitment to gender equality within an institutional theory framework. Through a content analysis of 15 reports and interviews with ClosinGap's management, the research explores its foundational purpose, aligned with shared and blended value principles, and assesses its brand management strategy centered on "storydoing." The findings reveal ClosinGap's strategic coherence, strong brand identity, and effective communication in media and social networks. Academically, this article highlights how the platform creates value for both businesses and society, offering valuable insights for those designing and evaluating corporate gender equality policies.

1. Introduction

In recent decades, gender equality has been one of the research topics generating the most interest related to the modern management of organizations, both in the public and private sectors (Báez et al., 2018). This trend can be explained, among other reasons, by the fact that it represents an issue that hinders economic growth and social progress (Belingheri et al., 2021). Among the main lines of research in business economics regarding gender issues is the one related to strategies and management within the field of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) (Díez-Martín et al., 2023). Numerous studies agree that female talent can represent a fundamental element in the proper management of CSR (Seto-Pamies, 2015), and its results can improve corporate legitimacy (Zhang et al., 2013; Díez-Martín et al., 2021) and company value (Fernández-Gago et al., 2016).

The relevance of legitimacy for the survival and growth of organizations has been widely documented by sociologists and business management scholars (Díez-Martín et al., 2022). Regardless of the doctrines defended by each trend or school, one of the aspects that has most occupied sociologists of any era has been how social and cultural values arise, how they spread, and how they change. Also, from the field of communication, research has been conducted on the effects of media on social change, with contemporary academic literature often avoiding a direct and linear consideration of their persuasive effects, to emphasize their conditional and cumulative nature (McQuail, 2010; Harris, 2009;

Preiss et al., 2007). However, aside from the debate about the media's influence, what is evident is that "the media have been integrated into the fabric of culture and society, and therefore condition and influence social practices; and at the same time, the media are influenced by the particularities of the contexts within which they are included" (Hjarvard, 2016: 51).

This research combines, for the first time, a descriptive study and an analysis of the communication strategies of the ClosinGap platform. This initiative was launched with the objective of quantifying the opportunity cost of the various gender gaps in the Spanish economy and society. The emergence of this cluster represented something novel; beyond the individual initiatives undertaken by organizations in their corporate policies, leading companies in their sectors decided to join forces and demonstrate their commitment to the fight for gender equality in society. The identification of the various studies addressed allows us to glimpse the issues that, from a general perspective, business leaders consider to be priority and relevant concerning this social issue. The communication analysis helps determine the content of their messages, the coherence with their goals, and the effectiveness of their transmission to the public through the media.

According to the sociologist Otis Duncan, to achieve a correct explanation of the transmission of values and social changes, it is essential to resort, among other things, to two elements: social organization and technology; being essential instruments through which society adapts to its environment (Duncan et al., 1959; Duncan, 1964). On

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the other hand, Johan Galtung proposes a concentric and dichotomous model of society, with a social center, which socially places a rewarded position and a periphery, which occupies less rewarded and even rejected positions (Galtung, 1964: 207–208). "The social center has a high degree of social participation, which it manifests through secondary communications (associations) and tertiary communications (mass media)" (Díez Nicolas, 2020: 66–67). Consequently, all the agents that make up that social center - politicians, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, and other opinion leaders - have the responsibility to create knowledge, generate rigorous discourse, and ensure the transmission of those messages related to cultural and social values that any community wants to promote.

Different theoretical models and their corresponding practical applications on social change undergo constant evolution over time, in continuous adaptation to novel approaches, trends, priorities, and technological tools applied to communication that define each historical moment. In general and synthetically, two approaches can be distinguished: the first seeks common understanding of society through the presentation of initiatives and policies, that is, a top-down model; the second is an ascending model that emphasizes the involvement of the grassroots in decision-making to improve society, partly supported by the possibilities offered by new media (Servaes, 2022).

There is an evident interest in the academic and business world in issues related to CSR, generating a driving and adaptive discourse of social change promoted from the mentioned social center. Similarly, and generally addressing the top-down model, governmental sectors have formulated and promulgated legislation that demands responsible behavior from organizations. By way of illustration, it is worth mentioning the political proposals of the 2030 Agenda articulated in a triple axis identified by the acronym ESG: Environmental (E), Social (S), and Governance (G), which involve the internal and external public of the organization. Without a doubt, all three elements are relevant, but it is worth considering that this third aspect, governance, is crucial; without the awareness of any corporate governance, its correct internal application, and the transmission of those values to society will be complicated.

Social inequity has a long tradition as a line of research in the field of social and economic sciences, largely due to its impact on human development. The case study on CloSinGap has the general objectives of deepening the knowledge of the involvement of Spanish companies in their social commitment and brand management regarding one of the initiatives emerged in favor of gender equity in Spain. To achieve this endeavor, three secondary objectives were set:

- O1- To know and describe the purpose and outlook of the organization.
- O2- To identify and examine the brand assets used in its communication management, delving into the methodology, results, conclusions, and recommendations of the generated contents.
- O3- To analyze and evaluate the media impact achieved in its communication actions.

2. Conceptual framework

Based on the conceptual framework of institutional theory, this research seeks to answer the following questions: What is the philosophy and purpose of the CloSinGap cluster? What topics do the reports and studies, which are altruistically made available to society, address? Is there consistency between the communication assets of the platform and the messages they disseminate? Which messages achieve the greatest coverage? What are the main dissemination channels, and which are the most effective?

Research grounded in the institutional theory has demonstrated the influence and transformative capacity of social changes on organizational management. It posits that social processes, obligations, or realities become institutional norms or rules, functioning as myths that

organizations adopt in the pursuit of legitimacy, resources, stability, and better survival prospects (Meyer & Rowan, 1977). Corporate legitimacy, understood as "the perceived appropriateness of an organization to a social system in terms of rules, values, norms, and definitions" (Deephouse et al., 2017), generates a sense of security and trust in the public and increases the willingness to accept the actions and decisions of those organizations perceived as legitimate (Haak et al., 2021; Tyler, 2006), thus becoming a competitive advantage (Miotto et al., 2020).

Consequently, CSR is no longer seen merely as a set of altruistic activities but is now integral to organizational management. It possesses a more comprehensive and transversal vision within organizational processes, becoming part of strategic planning and even constituting an operational model that, besides benefiting the company, contributes to community development (Murillo, 2022:5). Among others, two important concepts help understand this evolution: shared value (SV) and blended value (BV).

SV refers to those operational policies and practices that enhance a company's competitiveness while simultaneously improving the economic and social conditions in the communities where it operates (Porter & Kramer, 2011:6). This involves introducing initiative-taking strategies to identify activities within the value chain that can be improved and can generate economic and social impact. On the other hand, BV is related to the ability of organizations to generate economic, social, and environmental value through their investments and projects. These values should be intrinsically connected, forming an indivisible combination to maximize the benefits for all stakeholders. This presents a significant challenge for entrepreneurs, as it requires merging environmental, social, and commercial logics that often diverge in values, practices, and objectives (Laasch, 2018).

Organizations have accepted their leading role in seeking solutions to social and environmental challenges (Gregori & Holzmann, 2020). Entrepreneurs become key actors as they advance by implementing innovative and financially viable business models that generate positive social and environmental impacts (Evans et al., 2017; Hahn et al., 2018).

When it comes to the socioeconomic development trends that embody institutional factors, gender differences are one of the most important forecasters of entrepreneurial outcomes across both the social and economic realms (Murphy et al., 2021; Hechevarria et al., 2017; Lortie et al., 2017). Since the 1980s, research on gender and entrepreneurship has evolved from descriptive explorations to theoretical proposals. Gender differences in entrepreneurial activity are based, among other aspects, on environmental and cultural influences that shape social gender roles (Hofstede et al., 2010). Certain cultures are predisposed to associate the female gender with home care, family, and friendships, while they lean towards a male vision related to activities outside the home and earning the necessary income (Stephan & Pathakb, 2016).

One of the most relevant lines of research pertains to the motivations and goals of women entrepreneurs. Among the reasons justifying their decision to embark on entrepreneurial ventures are aspects such as dissatisfaction with their job situation and the search for alternatives compatible with their lifestyle, the balance between work and family, or the desire to achieve a better social status that allows for greater freedom and autonomy (Meyer et al., 2017; Chamorro-Premuzic et al., 2014). This line of research has shown that women entrepreneurs are less motivated by wealth creation and more by social value creation (Murphy et al., 2021).

In the last few years, academic and professional reflections on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) have gained significant prominence (Bernstein et al., 2020; Demangeot et al., 2019). They are omnipresent issues in today's public discourse that affect companies, brands, regulatory bodies, and policymakers. DEI opens new opportunities for brands, increases the possibilities for them to express their identity and alignment with consumer values; however, its implementation strategies require much more than generating a friendly narrative (Ferraro, Hemsley & Sands, 2023). Real and committed action is necessary, designed according to the values of its users, avoiding a dissonant

perception between the message and behavior, as it could be interpreted as false, illegitimate, or not credible.

Research on DEI is not a new cultural phenomenon. Already in the 1960s, movements appeared in the United States that promoted the acceptance of diversity and tolerance in social behaviors in line with civil rights (Dong, 2021). But, in the current context, phenomena such as MeToo or Black Lives Matter, and the discomfort associated with the pandemic, which disproportionately affected certain marginalized sectors, have incentivized interest.

To define DEI, it is essential to specify the concepts of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Diversity is understood as the set of physical or sociocultural differences linked to people and the representation of these differences in the market; equity, synonymous with equality, in personal relationships and in terms of opportunities, development, and achievement of results; and inclusion, which corresponds to the creation of a culture that promotes a sense of belonging to a collective with mutual interests in pursuing a goal among diverse groups (Arsel et al., 2022: 920).

Often, the effectiveness of actions undertaken on DEI strategies is limited by the quality of their implementation; the necessary time and attention are not always invested in articulating and fully communicating the objectives of the program, or in designing and effectively applying relevant policies and procedures (Iyer, 2009). Failed DEI policies are problematic for at least three reasons: underlying social inequality is not addressed; time and resources have been wasted on ineffective work; and failure can generate tensions and even conflicts between groups. These risks underline the importance of determining how to properly implement such programs (Iyer, 2022).

Social inequality exists worldwide and can be perceived through various group dimensions such as race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and gender. Precisely, this last aspect is the focus of attention of the present study, which could be included within the scope of Gender Social Responsibility (GSR), understood as the "set of measures aimed at eliminating discrimination against women, which the company voluntarily adopts internally, with the purpose of promoting conditions of equality between women and men" (Kahale, 2013: 84); intimately related to ethical business management based on a gender perspective (Medina-Vicent, 2017: 45). Its main motivation has been to identify and delve into those initiatives or policies promoted by organizations representing Spanish society in order to evaluate their level of commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion; to evaluate their effectiveness in the fight to eradicate the gender gap; and their capacity for communicative influence towards the rest of society. In this way, it can be seen as an analysis of the promotion of social values driven from the social center since they are companies and organizations with the capacity and resources to articulate a solid and argued discourse that contributes, legitimizes, and drives social change in a citizenship aware of the fight.

3. Methodology

The research methodology is structured in three stages: exploratory, analytical, and conclusive; with a timeframe ranging from September 2018 to December 2023. On September 7, 2018, the ClosinGap platform was presented, an initiative driven by large companies that emerged with the aim of quantifying the opportunity cost of the various gender gaps in the economy and society. It originates from the Healthy Women, Healthy Economies initiative, created by the company Merck under the auspices of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation Forum, with the intention of identifying and eliminating barriers that prevent women from reaching their full potential in society.

Regarding the choice of ClosinGap as the object of study, during the exploratory phase of the project, various organizations and projects were considered at the international and national levels that address the problem of gender equity and its implications in the creation of studies and reports. From different approaches, they all have a common goal: to promote gender equality and empower women. Internationally, it is

worth mentioning, for its relevance: the World Economic Forum (WEF), author of the prestigious annual Global Gender Gap Report, which measures gender differences in various countries regarding health, education, economy, and politics; UN Women, a United Nations entity that promotes global solutions; the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which through its Gender Data Portal offers a wide variety of indicators related to gender equality; Equal Measures 2030, an initiative that seeks to ensure that girls and women are at the center of efforts to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) for 2030, providing data to demonstrate the need for change; The Global Gender Equality Constitutional Database, a UN and University at Buffalo initiative that compiles laws and provisions from constitutions worldwide related to gender equality; EDGE Certified Foundation, an organization that offers certification to companies committed to establishing an equitable workplace for all genders and analyzes policies and practices to ensure that companies actively work to close the gender gap; or the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR), which conducts research from the United States on the inequalities suffered by women in the fields of employment, education, and health.

In Spain, there are also initiatives that address the gender gap from a broad perspective, among others, the following can be highlighted: the Institute of Women and for Equal Opportunities (IMIO), an autonomous body attached to the Ministry of Equality, responsible for promoting and fostering equal rights and opportunities between genders; the Women and Leadership Forum, which seeks to make visible those women leaders in different sectors and support equality in positions of responsibility and leadership; Women for Africa, a private foundation that works for the economic and social development of women on the African continent; the Themis Women Jurists Association, focused especially on the legal field and the fight for women's rights; the Association of Women Researchers and Technologists (AMIT), involved in reducing the gender gap in scientific and technological fields by combating social stereotypes. Women and Habitat Network, which promotes gender equity in housing and urban planning; and, finally, it seems appropriate to mention the numerous programs from Spanish universities dedicated to gender studies, researching, training, and disseminating gender equality.

The singularity of the ClosinGap project that is most appreciated is the translation of ethical approaches to its application in real life. In its purpose of achieving a fairer society, ethics refer us to the dimension of what should be, the problem arises in how to implement these ideal premises to configure a more equitable social reality. In the case of ClosinGap, how to integrate theoretical moral and ethical commitments on gender equality with their factual realization in the business framework. With a pragmatic vision, it focuses on creating reports based on tangible indicators capable of measuring the evolution of integration processes, with models that allow evaluating the economic cost that gender inequality causes. These aspirations are aligned with the policies undertaken more than a decade ago by the European Union, illustratively, the Report on Progress on Equality between Women and Men in 2010 can be remembered, where the institution warned that "the economic case for gender equality acknowledges the vast untapped economic potential of qualified women who are not using all of their skills and talents" (European Commission, 2011: 55).

The headline of the press release on September 7, 2018, announced the creation of a platform of companies under the name ClosinGap and outlined its foundational objective: "to analyze the opportunity cost of the gender gap in the economy and society." From an integrative and multisectoral perspective, with the aim of pooling efforts to generate useful knowledge about gender inequality, eleven companies operating in Spain and employing nearly one million workers worldwide (see Fig. 1) undertook a triple commitment: generating their own data for subsequent analysis; jointly developing recommendations to help close gender gaps; and implementing specific measures in their organizations aimed at eliminating any gender inequality and ensuring the utilization of women's talent.



Fig. 1. ClostinGap founding partners.

Source: <https://closinggap.com/sobre-nosotros/socios-y-partners/>

To meet the dual intention of the present analysis on ClostinGap, its descriptive historical nature and reflection on its brand management, the model called storydoing has been adopted. Storydoing can be understood as an alternative to the traditional operation of managing brands by organizations to increase their credibility, trust, reputation, and effectiveness. It can be defined as a proposal to generate content in the process of building and managing brands, based on creating products, services, and experiences that are perceived as tangible value by society (Baraybar & Luque, 2018: 452). Its postulates argue that the most important question of 21st-century communication is not what your brand is saying, but what is your brand doing? (Vallance, 2016; Arrufat-Martín, 2021). "Storydoing means you have to act, you have to do. The narration comes afterwards by sharing, by communicating the real actions that the company, person, or brand takes" (Barbany, 2015).

These postulates are based on three elements or phases in brand construction: purpose, related to the organization's goals that, in addition to ensuring its survival, are relevant to people's lives; brand assets, a well-formulated purpose requires acting in accordance with it, and its actions build the assets on which to articulate its story; brand amplification, communicating the existence of those assets in the most effective persuasive way. Regarding this last issue, the dissemination of messages will prioritize earned and owned media over paid media.

To identify the purpose and outlook of the collective initiative ClostinGap, it required conducting in-depth interviews with its management team, and examining the information disseminated through its own media. To recognize its brand assets, it required analyzing the fifteen published reports during the temporary research framework, and they were classified into three categories or sections according to the nature of the information collected: quantitative, qualitative, and sectoral. To describe, contextualize, and identify the social perspective of the studies—essential aspects in the preparation of CSR reports (Murillo-Pérez, 2022:21)—the content analysis technique was used. The information was interpreted and systematized "with the aim of making justified logical deductions about the source" (Andréu-Abela, 2000:3). The following structure was adopted for examination: topic addressed, promoting organization or company, indicators used, evaluation of results, specific methodological considerations of each study, and proposed recommendations.

Finally, as an indicator of its social impact and its effectiveness in communicative management, its media coverage was evaluated quantitatively and qualitatively over the past three years. To measure the degree of effectiveness of its mentions in conventional media, indicators such as the scope and audience of the medium, known in the professional jargon of public relations as Tier, were used at three levels and its advertising value or brand communicated value; on social networks, the volume of publications and impressions, the evolution of the number of followers, and the engagement rate were used to measure the degree of affinity of the audience with the contents.

4. Results

4.1. Purpose and mission

Marieta Jiménez, ClostinGap president, stated during the presentation of their first report, "Coste de oportunidad de la brecha de género en la salud" (Opportunity Cost of Gender Gap in Health): "We want to quantify a reality that exists and is on the public agenda, which has a clearly social aspect but also significant economic consequences that we will quantify, investigate, analyze, and contribute to eliminate. This is precisely what makes our initiative unique. Addressing inequality from a different perspective: that of numbers that give greater forcefulness to the social reality underlying each gender gap." (ClostinGap, 2018: 5).

Five years after its foundation, during the interview with Lucila García Méndez, general director of ClostinGap, she expressed her satisfaction with the results: "our level of satisfaction is high, the foundational commitments have been maintained, with concrete, tangible, and visible executions; 15 monographic studies, innovating in gender gaps not previously addressed, or approaching small and medium-sized enterprises, through Chambers of Commerce, with specific tools."

The organization's mission, vision, and values are stated on its official website, "Our mission is to promote measures and actions from the private and public spheres in favor of equal opportunities between women and men, thus contributing to equity and economic development and growth in line with the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)." Its vision is to promote "social transformation from the business sphere in terms of economy and women and act as a reference cluster in close collaboration between the public and private sectors." The four essential values that build its corporate culture are also reflected: innovation, considering diversity and gender equality as sources of innovation and economic growth; commitment, adhering to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) to be a driver of economic and social transformation; sustainability, contributing to the country's sustainability from the business sphere; and collaboration, with civil society, the private sector, and the administration.

Regarding its collaboration with other public institutions, illustratively, one can recall the use of ClostinGap reports in various documents of the Government of Spain for the preparation of the Recovery, Transformation, and Resilience Plan approved by the European Commission after the COVID-19 crisis. Also, cooperation on issues related to gender equality in the Spain 2050 project, promoted by the National Office of Prospective and Strategy under the Presidency of the Government. In turn, the incorporation of its research into monitoring the fulfillment of the fifth SDG objective, reducing the gender gap, for inclusive development.

According to its general director, the management process of ClostinGap is organized into three phases: "knowledge generation, carried out by professionals from leading companies in their respective markets; social transformation, developed in concrete projects based on the results obtained in research; and information, to disseminate the results obtained in society."

Cristina Fontgivells interview served to delve into aspects related to the dissemination of information, as partner and director of the Barcelona office of the communication consultancy Kreab, a founding company of ClostinGap. She highlights the results obtained among media professionals and their level of influence: "the rigor of the reports means that the media welcome our information"; "the impact, influence, and recognition achieved among opinion leaders regarding our initiatives and actions are significant." She points out how the ClostinGap index has been consolidated as a unique and proprietary indicator in Spain, which "is not only a benchmark in terms of measuring the economic impact of the gender gap but also helps to understand how we are evolving as a country and society on the path to equality."

The president of the Advisory Board of ClostinGap, Ana Polanco, confirms that "our goal is to continue generating knowledge with new reports and, at the same time, identify actions that can help close gender

gaps and transform us into a more inclusive, fair, and productive society that allows us to have a higher quality of life." In their future lines of action, their general director reiterates that ClosinGap: "as an active member of society, maintains the clear commitment to favoring the leadership role of women and their access to managerial positions." Among the lines of action, they wish to undertake in their programs is promoting female talent among young women, improving the measurement of the gender gap through the refinement of their indicators, and implementing new metrics and improving their relational ecosystem internationally.

4.2. ClosinGap reports as brand value

Research on the gender gap and its economic, social, and cultural implications encompasses a broad and complex area, which can be approached from multiple perspectives. The main asset of the ClosinGap brand is the reports it develops. These reports highlight the lack of social equity for women in various sectors and aspects of their lives such as health, education, digitalization, employment, or public visibility. Based on specific data and rigorous methodologies designed by specialized professionals from leading companies in their sector, they allow for a very close assessment of the existing inequality between men and women in Spain, as well as observing its evolution. Finally, in addition to the results obtained, specific recommendations are added to advance equality of opportunity.

These studies can be classified into three types:

- Quantitative Studies:
 - o Gender pay-gap: Investigates the difference in wages between men and women for the same work and the reasons explaining these differences.
 - o Labor force participation: Examines the labor force participation rate between men and women and analyzes the reasons for this discrimination.
 - o Economic impact: Quantifies the economic cost of not harnessing female talent on equal terms and the potential loss in the country's wealth.
- Qualitative Studies:
 - o Cultural and social barriers: Conducts interviews and focus groups to understand the perceptions and attitudes that may be maintaining inequality.
 - o Testimonies and case studies: Documents and analyzes stories of women in different sectors to identify existing challenges and future opportunities.
- Sectoral Analysis:
 - o Investigates how the gender gap manifests in different disciplines, such as technology, medicine, or education.

4.2.1. Description of the reports carried out by ClosinGap during the research timeframe

- **ClosinGap Index:** This report, with the most significant impact published by the association, has been analyzed in depth compared to many others. Developed by the consulting firm Price Waterhouse Coopers (PwC), it analyzes five critical categories (employment, education, work-life balance, digitalization, and health and well-being) composing 28 key variables. To date, three editions have been produced, representing the first indicator proposal to quantify gender parity in the mentioned categories and evaluate the impact of different gender gaps on the Spanish GDP (ClosinGap, 2023a).

Two relevant methodological considerations about the variables included in the index aim to improve its objectivity on gender parity: it does not assess the level of each variable but rather the difference between men and women (women/men ratio) to quantify the gender gap,

and it incorporates outcome variables, disregarding political, cultural, or societal aspects.

All data incorporated are converted to women/men ratios; however, variables with negative connotations are converted to men/women ratios, for instance, precarious employment or school dropout. Since the ClosinGap Index aims to measure how close women are to achieving parity with men, it neither rewards nor penalizes gaps that go in the opposite direction; for example, despite more women than men having tertiary education, the ratio is capped at 100 as the maximum value. The data are converted to ratios, truncated, and grouped into the five variables or sub-indices based on the Euclidean distance proportionally on a scale of 0 to 100, with 0 indicating minimum parity and 100 indicating maximum parity. Once the sub-indices per category are calculated, the data are grouped in the ClosinGap Index, based on the Euclidean distance proportionally, as done in the sub-indices.

The impact of the gender gap on the GDP, quantified from the supply side, considers the value of expenditure (household consumption, public sector expenditure, business investment, and trade balance), value added (in agriculture, industry, construction, and services), and income value (labor and capital). Maintaining the progress recorded in the period 2015–2022, it would take 33 years to achieve gender parity in Spain, and it evaluates the GDP wasted by the existing gender gap in the labor market (in participation, working hours, and productivity) at 212.2 billion euros, which would increase the 2021 GDP by 17.6 %. The ClosinGap Index showed positive evolution compared to 2021, as the pandemic's impact on the gap diminished, surpassing that of 2020 by six tenths. The sub-indices contributing to this growth are found in all indicators except health and well-being.

- **Gender gap in emotional health:** The report, promoted by the company Merck, a leader in pharmaceuticals and biotechnology, addresses the gender gap in emotional health from four perspectives: mood, occupational health, self-care, and the situation of young people. Its data are extracted from official international sources such as the World Health Organization or the National Statistics Institute, as well as proprietary sources like Merck's Emotional Health Survey: What Moves European Youth?, directed at 75,000 participants from Generation Z and Millennials in over ten European countries. Among the conclusions of the report published in October 2023, it is estimated that depression and anxiety entail a loss of 18,590.4 million euros to the Spanish economy, with 37 % (6872.4 million euros) caused by the gender gap present in the prevalence of depression and anxiety among women (ClosinGap, 2023b: 43).
- **Gender gap in digital professions:** Through dimensions of digital skills, digital education, employment, visibility, and hybrid work, the report, promoted by Telefónica, analyzes the economic effects that closing the gender gap in digital professions would have in Spain. The study determines that relinquishing women's greater role in digital professions would have an opportunity cost for Spanish society over the next thirty years of 71.7 billion euros, equivalent to 6.4 % of the 2021 GDP (ClosinGap, 2022c: 3). In a previous report by Vodafone, the social causes of inequalities between men and women in the digital environment were identified based on four variables: equipment/use, skills/abilities, (cultural) stereotypes, and competition/available supply (ClosinGap, 2020b: 13). Information elaborated with data from the National Statistics Institute and the company itself concluded "that women have digital competencies related to communication and information, whereas men excel in digital software and problem-solving" (p. 17).
- **Gender gap in SMEs and self-employed:** The study, driven by the CEOE Foundation, reveals for the first time the contribution to the Spanish economy that closing the gap in SMEs and self-employed individuals would entail. Eliminating this gap would result in an increase in Gross Value Added (GVA) of just over 130 billion euros, an amount equivalent to almost 11 % of the GDP in 2021 (ClosinGap, 2022b).

- **Gender gap in rural areas:** The report, undertaken by CaixaBank, confirms that "people in rural areas, particularly women, face greater difficulties in terms of job opportunities, connectivity, and access to public services and/or specialized care" (ClosinGap, 2022a: 8).
- **Gender gap in disability:** From the dual perspective of the gender gap and disability, the social group ONCE extracts from its report the conclusion that "wage gaps are more conditioned by gender than by disability" (ClosinGap, 2021b: 65).
- **Gender gap in public visibility:** The consulting firm KREAB developed an index that quantifies gender diversity in leadership positions within politics, business, and the media. The report highlights that "Spain has a representation of women of 26.4 %, far from countries like Iceland and France, which top the ranking with 45.9 % and 45.2 %, respectively." However, "in the media, Spain records the highest percentage of women's presence, at 29 %, and is also the only one where it is above the European average" (ClosinGap, 2021a: 23).
- **Gender gap in consumption:** The research, supported by L'Oréal Spain, emphasizes the essential role of women as a basic support for consumption in households and provides an econometric analysis of gender inequality in this area (ClosinGap, 2020c).
- **Gender gap in employment:** The PwC report significantly highlights the fundamental factors contributing to the gender gap in the workplace. Several causes are identified, including career interruptions due to pregnancy or lactation, gender disparities in the selection of studies and professions, late entry of women into the labor market due to historical reasons, and the mistaken perception of shared responsibility in family roles (ClosinGap, 2020a).
- **Gender gap in tourism:** Meliá Hotels International's analysis highlights the essential nature of tourism as a vital activity, not only for individual well-being but also for the economy as a whole. The analysis points to a gap in this sector, based on the premise that gender acts as a distinguishing factor in the effective demand for tourist services, for example: "Women residing in Spain make only one-third of the business trips made by men" (ClosinGap, 2019e: 40).
- **Gender gap in mobility:** The publication presented by BMW Group points out the notable gender differences in the field of mobility. Among the conclusions reached, it is worth mentioning that women "have proven to be catalysts for more sustainable and efficient mobility" (ClosinGap, 2019d: 66).
- **Gender gap in leisure:** The study developed by Mahou San Miguel highlights that, according to the most recent Time Use Survey by the INE, women have significantly less free time compared to men, which could have significant implications in terms of equity and quality of life. Specifically, they have one hour and thirty-seven minutes less per day for leisure and rest activities (ClosinGap, 2019c).
- **Gender gap in pensions:** The comprehensive work of the insurer MAPFRE reflects how women's work history is determinant of the gender gap in their pensions, mainly due to contribution gaps due to maternity, care, and upbringing (ClosinGap, 2019b: 65).
- **Gender gap in work-life balance:** The report, provided by Repsol, examines the disparity in work-life balance and its impacts on the economy and society. This disparity can be characterized as a set of gender-based inequalities influencing the availability and use of time dedicated by men and women to attend to all aspects of their daily lives (ClosinGap, 2019a).

4.3. Brand enhancement in conventional media and social networks

ClosinGap's corporate communication strategy in the media focuses on aspects related to those with the greatest influence and aimed at leading opinion audiences. In this regard, the brand has driven a communication strategy focused on presence in national mainstream and economic media through the management of interviews and reports, as well as the dissemination of relevant content provided. This aspect is reflected in the analysis of impacts concentrated in Tier 1 media

referenced, which have increased during the three years of the study. The percentage of mentions of ClosinGap in Tier 1 media during 2023 was 15.9 %, surpassing the percentages of 2022 and 2021 –14.7 % and 13.6 % respectively- Therefore, the evolution of its effectiveness can be considered favorable.

In parallel with the analysis conducted, various actions can be identified in the field of corporate communication aimed at positioning the brand in regional and sectoral reference media Fig. 2.

In the year 2022, the highest number of media impacts was recorded, totaling 833. During this period, 14.7 % were achieved in Tier 1 media, of which 23.2 % were direct references related to the II ClosinGap Index. In 2023, the number of impacts reached 565, with a Tier 1 index of 15.9 % and 34.1 % of references to the III ClosinGap Index; consequently, a lower number of impacts, but a significant number of these in top-tier media and an increase of 10.9 % in direct mentions or references to its most relevant study compared to the previous year. The year 2021 marked the beginning of the project, with impacts on 543 media outlets, comprising 13.6 % in Tier 1 and 44.5 % references to the index Fig. 3.

The media impacts obtained have had a significant reach and progression. We observe how in each of the years analyzed, the audience has increased, with one of the main factors being the impact on national and Tier 1 segmented media. The audience increase in 2022 is 30 million people compared to 2021 and 72 million compared to 2023, almost doubling the figures between these two years. Thus, each media impact in 2023 reached, on average, 284,835 people, improving the data from 2022 to 2021 (142,469 and 162,571, respectively).

Additionally, it is notable that the year 2022 accounts for 42 % of the brand's communicated value with a total evaluated equivalent of 3.1 million euros, followed by the year 2023 with 2.7 million euros representing 36 % of the total, and finally, the year 2021 with a total of 1.6 million euros and the remaining 22 % Fig. 4.

Regarding the digital communication strategy, ClosingGap positions itself on the profiles of the X and LinkedIn social networks. The brand employs a differentiated strategy in both, segmenting audiences, messages, and content. The evolution on ClosingGap's social networks shows organic growth in followers, with a combined community of 5090 users. This data demonstrates positive growth and the formation of a strong community.

One of the most interesting metrics for analysis on social networks is the engagement rate, an indicator that seeks to measure the interest and commitment of the audience with the published content. There is a noticeable increase in both X and LinkedIn during the analysis period.

The comparative diachronic study between both social networks shows certain differences, although growth is recorded on both platforms. In 2021, Twitter presented a modest engagement rate of 0.7 %, a significant increase the following year with 2.3 %, and reached 3 % in 2023. On the other hand, the professional platform LinkedIn maintains a different pattern with higher engagement; in 2021, it stood at 5.6 %,

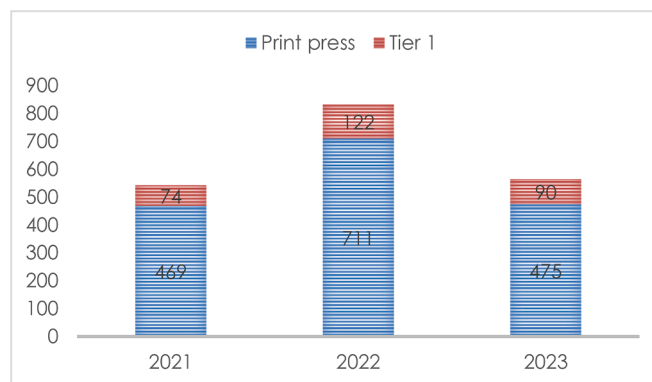


Fig. 2. Print press impact in 2021, 2022 y 2023.
Source: Authors' own elaboration.

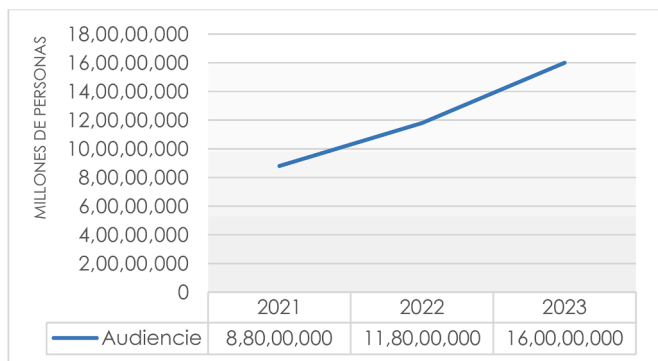


Fig. 3. Global cumulative reach during the years 2021, 2022 y 2023. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

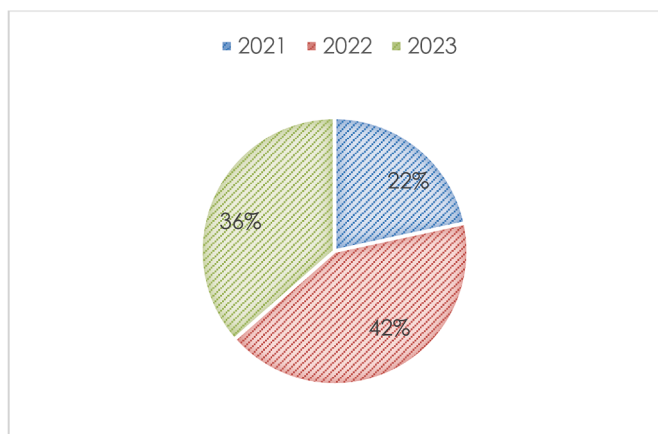


Fig. 4. Transmitted value in the years 2021, 2022 y 2023. Source: Authors' own elaboration.

showed slight growth in 2022 with 5.9 %, and a significant result in 2023 by reaching an 8.2 % engagement rate.

The disparity in engagement levels between the two platforms could be due to the specific characteristics and expectations of the audience on each of them. While X tends to be more immediate and focused on brief conversations, LinkedIn is oriented towards a professional audience and more detailed content. Overall, the constant increase in the engagement rate indicates an improvement in the effectiveness of the implemented strategies, reflecting a greater connection with the audience on both platforms over time Fig. 5.

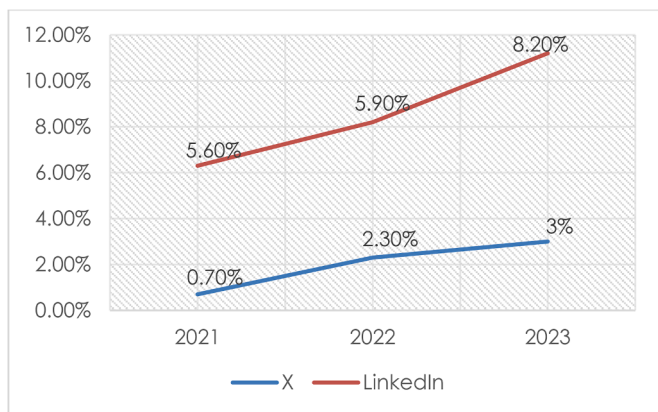


Fig. 5. Engagement rate evolution on X y LinkedIn. Source: Authors' own elaboration

The social network X (see Table 1) has been primarily used as a channel for amplifying news and milestones of the company, and to a lesser extent, as a means of interaction with partners. Additionally, it is the main channel for disseminating events held by the association. The number of posts has been decreasing, along with the number of impressions and interactions, with only the number of followers increasing slightly. The decrease in the number of posts could be interpreted as a possible shift in its social media communication strategy, and the increase in the engagement rate as the identification of those contents most relevant to the community.

On the other hand, LinkedIn (see Table 2) is the channel where more specific content about the association's activities is provided. It also serves as a showcase for potential partners and is used as a space for interaction among partners and participants in various initiatives. The number of posts, impressions, and followers shows a steady growth.

5. Conclusions

The research has shown the association's contribution to social progress, specifically in raising awareness of and counteracting the gender gap. It serves as an example of implementing shared value by leveraging the skills, resources, and management capacity of its partners to engage in social leadership in this area (Porter & Kramer, 2011:18). Before beginning any action to promote social change, given the possible diversity of criteria and in the search for common agreements, an attempt must be made to answer, among others, two essential questions: where is the evidence? Where are the data? ClosinGap demonstrates its contribution to the public debate on gender equality through the analysis of the 15 reports. Any opinion on any issue involves an evaluation; therefore, for an opinion to exist, there must be prior knowledge of or perception of that particular subject. The main contribution of the reports provided by ClosinGap is the effort to measure the evident gender gaps existing in Spain, some of which have not been addressed before. The consequences of eradicating the gender gap are not only an ideal to pursue; from a pragmatic perspective, but the loss of that talent also translates into real losses for our economy; although, sometimes, these are issues of undeniable difficulty to measure.

The platform brings together a considerable number of leading companies in their respective sectors, therefore, with resources to generate knowledge from the social center. The platform itself is a manifestation of the capacity of these business leaders to generate secondary communications and, subsequently, to convert them into tertiary ones through the media diffusion of their activities. By presenting initiatives, it seeks to contribute to improving society, responding to the top-down approach mentioned earlier in the introduction to this paper. In everyday life, it may seem paradoxical that these reports come from business economic circles where significant gender differences still exist, and where women have more difficulties than men in reaching top positions of responsibility and power. The Gender Equality Index of the European Union for 2023 reflects this; gender inequalities are more pronounced in the field of power (59.1 points), and the subdomain of economic decisions (54.7 points) ranks second with the lowest score of all subdomains of this index throughout the EU (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2023).

These differences are reflected and quantified in ClosinGap's own reports. As illustrative examples, two references among the many that have appeared can be mentioned: "the probability that a chairman of a

Table 1 Summary table for X data.

Years	Posts	Prints	Interactions	Followers	Engagement Rate
2021	303	420.692	4.151	2.146	0,7 %
2022	271	119.884	2.814	2.232	2,3 %
2023	201	36.176	1.108	2.318	3 %

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Table 2
Summary table for LinkedIn data.

Years	Posts	Prints	Interactions	Followers	Engagement Rate
2021	56	48.539	2.739	1.915	5,6 %
2022	59	67.621	4.020	2.361	5,9 %
2023	63	47.027	3.840	2.778	8,2 %

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

Board of Directors of an IBEX 35 company is a man is 16 times higher than the probability that it is a woman. A fact that evidences the limitations that women encounter to access decision-making positions within companies" (ClosinGap, 2021a: 7); and referring to the tourism sector, it is emphasized again that "women hold fewer managerial positions than men" (ClosinGap, 2019e: 30). These pieces of evidence show an attempt at objective positioning in their studies and a certain level of self-criticism. It is also noteworthy the transparency and diligence of the platform during the elaboration process of this research.

Delving into the determinants of female entrepreneurial activity generates significant implications for those who formulate, deliver, and evaluate gender equality policies in businesses (De la O Cordero & Pulido, 2020). It allows executives to enhance their understanding and foster reflection on their strategies and involvement to mitigate the existing gender gap. The data obtained from the various analyzed reports can be considered and integrated into their management policies, encouraging organizations to develop more efficient gender projects.

Regarding the future lines of action for ClosingGap, it aims to promote women's leadership roles and their access to executive positions. The value of this initiative is supported by various studies that demonstrate how gender diversity contributes to value creation in companies by improving problem-solving and decision-making (Campbell & Mínguez-Vera, 2008; Huse et al., 2009; Cambrea et al., 2023).

The analysis carried out has allowed us to observe and confirm a coherent use of the brand according to the premises of the storydoing model. The purpose of the platform is defined clearly and precisely. The information gathered in its own media and through the statements of its executives during the in-depth interviews carried out are fully aligned. The reports generated are considered as the main brand assets and configure, consistently, the central argument of their communications as amplifiers of it.

The creativity to develop suggestive messages that manage to generate interest in a broad audience, bringing reality closer to other non-specialized audiences and promoting their interest, is significant. The way in which the obtained data is presented, whose interpretation and understanding could be difficult, is summarized in an attractive and visible way; for example, in the dissemination of the III ClosinGap index to quantify the impact of the different gender gaps on the Spanish GDP, the phrase was used: "it would take 33 years at the current pace to achieve gender parity in Spain."

The corporate communication strategy of ClosinGap in the media has proven to be effective, especially when targeting mainstream and national economic media. The focus on these top-tier media in terms of their dissemination and influence, reflected in the increase in mentions in Tier 1 during 2023, determines a positive qualitative evolution and efficient management. The progression in the accumulated audience, with constant growth and significant impact in Tier 1 media, indicates ClosinGap's ability to amplify its message to a wider audience.

Being an inclusive association, its actions are not limited only to large companies and corporations. Through the Chambers of Commerce, they also try to involve small and medium-sized companies, usually with fewer resources to fight inequality. This type of action has a significant impact on regional and local media, covering a space that is often neglected. This is a noteworthy aspect because while leading companies provide an advantageous study environment, among other factors, due to their stronger connection with the institutional environment, it can create issues in generalizing the results regarding the influence of their

initiatives on smaller companies with fewer resources (Zhang, 2020).

Regarding the digital communication strategy, it has managed to build a solid presence on social networks X and LinkedIn. The organic growth in followers, as well as the constant increase in the participation rate on both platforms, suggest an effective connection with the audience. The differentiation in the strategy between both networks, adapting to the specific expectations of each platform, demonstrates a deep understanding of the target audience. Although the X social network has experienced a decrease in the number of publications, an increase in the participation rate has been observed, indicating a more selective and efficient approach to the platform. Overall, the analysis of the engagement rate on both networks reflects a constant progress in the effectiveness of the strategies implemented by ClosinGap in the digital field.

The report with the greatest media impact has been the III edition of the ClosinGap Index, the index that seeks to quantify the economic impact and measure the evolution of the gender gap in Spain. It can be said that it has become a reference, although, as with any model, it is based on certain assumptions that condition its results. Thus, men would not see their presence in the labor market reduced, nor the number of hours worked, nor productivity due to increased female participation; or any effect on productivity derived from increased labor supply is excluded.

The awareness and positive evolution in gender equality experienced in recent years in many areas of social, political, and economic life are noticeable. However, much remains to be done for female talent to fully participate in all social fields. ClosinGap members, in addition to continuing their efforts to achieve gender equality in society, have the capacity to implement and turn their organizations into real examples to combat the gender gap through concrete and tangible actions in their organizations. The dissemination of the results obtained would increase their credibility and confidence, by avoiding dissonances between their messages and their behavior, between what should be and reality.

At a national level, ClosinGap is just one example of the corporate contributions in gender equality matters. In Spain, as in many other countries, gender equality is a topic of social and political relevance. Although ClosinGap is a unique initiative in its approach to quantifying the economic cost of gender inequality, there are other organizations and projects in Spain working to address and reduce the gender gap, such as the Institute for Women and Equal Opportunities (IMIO), Women and Leadership Forum, or Women for Africa, among others. Furthermore, at the international level, there are several projects and organizations working on similar issues, focusing on the gender gap and its economic and social implications, such as the World Economic Forum (WEF) Global Gender Gap Report, UN Women, or the OECD Gender Data Portal, among others.

Any initiative that provides information based on solid methodologies and, therefore, capable of generating valid knowledge should always be well received and recognized. Although it is worth remembering that Francis Bacon affirmed that knowledge is power, and Michel Foucault inverted the idea to argue that power determines what is considered knowledge (Garton, 2017: 47–48).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Antonio Baraybar-Fernández: Validation, Methodology, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Sandro Arrufat-Martín:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Eduardo Arrufat-Reboso:** Writing – review & editing, Investigation, Formal analysis, Conceptualization.

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