



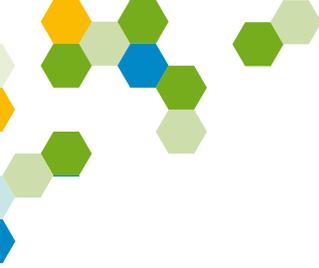
SPECIAL REPORT

The Doria effect. The impact of communication on the management of a city

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I. INTRODUCTION

In May 2016, a survey on the world's leading economies by the German NGO GfK Verein¹ ranked Brazil (along with Spain and France) as the country where its citizens least trust their politicians. Like in the case of Spaniards, only 6 percent of Brazilians admitted to trust politicians. When asked specifically about mayors, a scarce 10 percent of Brazilians approved of their city's leadership.

Over the past year, the corruption scandals in Brazil, brought to light through the "Lava-Jato" trials, have done little to improve this perception. On the contrary, approval of the country's leadership is now at an all-time low.

Ex-ministers, ex-governors, ex-secretaries, former members of congress and entrepreneurs are now in prison facing long-term trials and penalties.

To give a simple example, five of the six members of the Rio de Janeiro Court of Accounts (responsible for overseeing state expenditures) were recently accused of—and arrested for—receiving bribes in exchange for tax breaks. An unprecedented event that left the state of Rio de Janeiro virtually without auditors, bringing the administrative machinery to a halt.

In a scenario such as this, how is it possible that João Doria, the mayor of the largest and most important city in Brazil, has managed to reach record popularity in little over 100 days after taking office, better than all his predecessors?

According to a survey by the newspaper Folha de São Paulo that evaluated the 100 days of the mayor's term², **43 percent of the people of São Paulo rank Doria's management as good or very good—a first for any of the city's mayors.**

This article is not an evaluation of Mayor João Doria's management, nor the fulfillment of his Government Plan. It is a brief overview of some of the keys to how the current mayor of São Paulo has leveraged communication as a way to manage his reputation and maintain a direct dialogue with his people.

¹ *Brasileiro é quem menos confia em político, diz pesquisa mundial*. Estado de S. Paulo, May 11, 2016. <http://politica.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,brasileiro-e-quem-menos-confia-em-politico-diz-pesquisa-mundial,10000050380>

² *Em três meses, Doria tem aprovação recorde, mas 20 % já o rejeita*. Folha de São Paulo, April 8, 2017. <http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/cotidiano/2017/04/1873919-em-tres-meses-doria-tem-aprovacao-recorde-mas-20-ja-o-rejeitam-em-sp.shtml>

“Two of the key factors [...] have been to present himself as a manager rather than a politician and to efficiently use communication to convey this narrative”

2. THE POLITICS OF NARRATIVE BEYOND JUST MESSAGES

Against all odds, João Doria was elected mayor of São Paulo in the first round, with 53 percent of the votes. No poll had hinted such a resounding victory.

His candidacy for mayor of São Paulo was Doria's first time running in an election. A newcomer to politics, best known for his work as a journalist and as one of the city's wealthiest entrepreneurs; Founder and President of Grupo Lide and specialized in high-level business networking.

Aside from the circumstantial (albeit no less important) issues of his rise to mayor, beyond beginner's luck, two of the key factors of the process—which he has managed to maintain over his first 100 days in office—have been to present himself as a manager rather than a politician and to efficiently use communication to convey this narrative.

Like Barack Obama in the United States, Antanas Mockus's first term as mayor of Bogotá, Justin Trudeau in Canada and José Mujica in Uruguay, Doria's strength comes not from creating a key message (“I'm a manager and not a politician”) but rather

from building and executing a government narrative around that concept.

And because this type of storytelling takes a massive amount of work to manage, communicating this narrative must be both effective and efficient.

3. THE KEYS TO STORYTELLING

As Professor Fernando Schüler suggests³, **Doria has succeeded in “turning communication into a tool of governance”**. This alone would suffice to account for much of his popularity. But how did he do it?

1. Defining the narrative's main character

The character's name is João Doria, a workaholic who only sleeps three hours a day and has a packed schedule that starts at seven in the morning. Nor does he rest on weekends, and he forces his team to keep up the same pace. He hates long meetings and established fines for secretaries who arrived late to scheduled meetings.

Unlike other mayors, Doria spends most of his time outside the office: a surprise visit to a hospital, cleaning a street dressed as a city cleaner, or using a wheelchair to

³ Schüler, Fernando. *Joao Doria, o prefeito espetáculo*. In the *Época* magazine, April 2, 2017

“Thus adding an additional element to his character: humanity. A mayor who is wrong and says that he is?”

demonstrate the inaccessibility of train platforms. He has also painted city walls gray in a crusade against graffiti and took a bus ride just like millions of São Paulo's workers do every day.

In this narrative, this Mayor is the hero built in opposition to his predecessors, the bureaucracy and all that represents inefficient city management (the villains). It is in this way that the Mayor generates empathy with his target audience (Brazil as a whole?⁴) and creates an emotional bond with them (positive or negative).

Mayor Doria has personified people that coexist in the day-to-day life of the city; not a character who kisses children or cuts ribbons, but rather one that stars in roles that require management and action.

In one of his first decisions as mayor, Doria declared war on the city's graffiti, painting the walls of major avenues gray and erasing urban art works by artists of the sort of *Os Gemeos*.

In a recent interview, the mayor admitted to failing to separate artistic graffiti from

urban vandalism, regretting the measure, thus adding an additional element to his character: humanity. A mayor who is wrong and says that he is?

2. Turnindetails into stories

Stories that become part of narratives are crucial for keeping the audience's attention. Many times these stories are generated from small details. The following two examples should suffice:

The first refers to the published policy in which the mayor decreed an end to the formal treatment of city employees. Terms like “most excellent” will no longer be used, only terms such as Mr. and Mrs. “Call me simply mayor or João the Worker”, announced Doria on his Facebook page.

A model that, incidentally, Doria decided to follow after witnessing the informal treatment used at the office of mayor Horacio Larreta (another businessman-cum-politician) in Buenos Aires.

The second example was the suspension of the city's Official Gazette. Printing the gazette

⁴ According to Federal deputy Heráclito Fortes, many people in the interior of Piauí (northeastern Brazil) constantly ask for “that Doria”, a man of which they all speak extremely well. In *João Doria comemora popularidade no Nordeste*. Exame, 12/03/17. <http://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/joao-doria-comemora-popularidade-no-nordeste/>

⁵ *Doria se arrepende e diz que avaliou mal os episódios dos grafites da 23 de Maio*. Forun, April 7, 2017. <http://www.revistaforum.com.br/2017/04/07/doria-se-arrepende-e-diz-que-avaliou-mal-o-episodio-dos-grafites-da-23-de-maio/>

“Another important element in good storytelling is to get the audience to relate to plot points and scenarios”

was a minimum expense within the city’s entire budget. However, in times of crisis, these details turn into stories that shape the public opinion, in the same way that Doria did by selling the mayor’s official cars and cutting costs.

One of the hardest things to do in any narrative is to keep the audience's attention over time. The use of details, as sources of constant stories, help maintain this tension.

3. Creating scenarios that the public can relate to

Another important element in good storytelling is to get the audience to relate to plot points and scenarios.

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One of the pledges of Doria's government has been the need to generate more agreements with private companies. This is not a new idea and it obviously refers to scenarios like privatization.

Not that this is not one of the objectives of Doria’s Government Plan, but it certainly is a facet that generates public tensions.

Thus, the Mayor's storytelling refers first to generating an emotional connection with the public. An example of this is the agreement Doria’s government signed with McDonald's to employ the homeless⁶. The pilot project contemplates a 40-hour emotional training course in order to rebuild the self-esteem and confidence of people who live on the streets of São Paulo.

Private initiatives are integrated into city management by including them in scenarios that citizens can relate to. According to the mayor, over five thousand jobs have been generated with similar initiatives, turning this into one of the most visible stories of Doria’s project with a huge media and social media impact.

4. Appealing to humor

At the end of March, Amazon launched a video ad campaign for its Kindle reader which showed fragments of stories projected on the gray walls painted by Doria in his “war” against graffiti artists. “We covered the gray with stories”, the video said at the end⁷.

Doria—in a humorous response that imitated the ad’s video format (released on social media)—recorded a video with

⁶ *Doria faz parceria com Mac Donald's para empregar moradores de rua*. Estado de S. Paulo, March 17, 2017. <http://sao-paulo.estadao.com.br/noticias/geral,doria-faz-parceria-com-mcdonalds-para-empregar-cem-moradores-de-rua,70001703285>

⁷ See ad at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yiAfYd6zrCY>

“This strategy of 2.0 channels, which prioritizes videos of Doria staring at the camera and “conversing” with the public, has been key in making his narrative go viral”

a message for the American company, which he posted on his social media accounts. “If Amazon has such love for São Paulo and for Brazil, then help our city by donating what the population needs and make it a happier city”⁸.

Two companies immediately responded. Saraiva, an important chain of bookstores in Brazil, took to social media to express its interest in joint projects. Kabum, an online electronics store, also announced that it would donate computers and tablets to the city. Amazon wasn't far behind and also announced on its Facebook page that it would donate Kindle readers and free books to schools.

Through humor and social media, the people of São Paulo saw how their mayor turned around a campaign that was a clear criticism of his policies.

5. (Last but not least) using transmedia storytelling and interaction

Many of these stories and details would not be as well-known were not woven into the social media strategy that made it possible for the mayor to reach more people using different formats.

After his first 100 days in office, the mayor now has over two million likes on Facebook and 300,000+ followers on Twitter. Doria has opted for a strategy based of direct dialogue with citizens, via social media, using text, photos and videos.

In its first three months in office, he has published more than 145 videos on Facebook. His post about his visit to McDonald's (as part of the aforementioned project) has already been viewed over six million times. Not bad for a... mayor?

This strategy of 2.0 channels, which prioritizes videos of Doria staring at the camera and “conversing” with the public, has been key in making his narrative go viral.

According to a study commissioned by Exame magazine, 55 percent of the people of São Paulo recognize that Doria is a mayor who is closer to the citizens than his predecessors⁹.

At the beginning of the election, Doria's profile was that of a successful, elite and wealthy entrepreneur, far removed from ordinary citizens and the needs of the city. A good narrative and a strong social media strategy have helped reverse that image.

⁸ Watch video at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0h6hM1os17w>

⁹ *O que explica o sucesso de Joao Doria nas Redes Sociais*. In the Exame magazine, April 11, 2017. <http://exame.abril.com.br/brasil/o-que-esta-por-tras-do-sucesso-de-doria-nas-redes-sociais/>

“Clear, consistent
and well-structured
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management tool”

Some specialists also single out the fact that Doria has kept his social media accounts personal and posts to his own accounts, not those of the city mayor. He finances the management of his personal accounts from his own pocket, bringing him closer to the public¹⁰.

3. COMMUNICATION, A MANAGEMENT TOOL

A journalist like Doria recognized the role that communication can (and in many cases, must) play in city management, just as it does in any company.

Due to his massive popularity he is now considered an option for the presidential race of 2018, a possibility that Doria has ruled out for the time being.

However, little progress has been made on his structural agenda of 118 pledges made at the beginning of his term. Despite his positive image, the percentage of people who think he is a bad mayor jumped from 13 percent to 20 percent in his first three months in office.

Just like in a company, good communication does not necessarily mean that management results are positive.

Communication should not be interpreted as an exercise in propaganda or the sale of a product (whether good or bad), but rather as a management tool which, when properly leveraged, opens channels of dialogue with society and conveys a narrative that brings city leaders closer to citizens.

Well-implemented communication helps build the needed trust and transparency between those who govern and those who are governed, helping identify those spaces of conversation where people can discuss ideas and projects. Clear, consistent and well-structured communication is a key management tool.

Ultimately, communication is what helps build and convey the basic storytelling for a manager. The results of any Government at the end of its term are those that ultimately define whether the created narrative is a believable story with a happy ending or a just another weekend blockbuster.

For now, the way in which the mayor of São Paulo is managing his communication and his reputation is something that is worth following closely, very closely.

¹⁰ According to Átila Francucci, the creative director of João Doria's campaign, this strategy of personal social media accounts turns “the people around him every day into managers. This is something that nobody had done before: to have an immense personal exhibition space”. Exame, *op. cit.*

Autores



Juan Carlos Gozzer is Managing Director at S/A LLORENTE & CUENCA. Expert in reputation management and communication strategies. Juan Carlos has collaborated in the development of strategic communication plans for clients such as Sonae Sierra Brasil, Cisneros, and Light Energia, among others. With academic education in Brazil and abroad, Juan Carlos has a Bachelor's degree in Political Sciences and Specialization in International Information from the Universidad Complutense de Madrid, as well as a Master's degree in International Relations from the University of Bologna.

jcgozzer@llorentycuenca.com



Thyago Mathias is Director at S/A LLORENTE & CUENCA. He graduated in Journalism from the Pontifical Catholic University in Rio de Janeiro and in Law from the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. He has 10 years of experience in the largest media groups in Brazil, such as UOL and TV Globo, for which he was correspondent in the Middle East (G1 portal). He majored in International Relations and holds an MBA in Project Management from the Getúlio Vargas Foundation. Thyago has been a communication, reputation strategies and assessment consultant for several public and private institutions.

tmathias@llorentycuenca.com

LLORENTE & CUENCA

CORPORATE MANAGEMENT

José Antonio Llorente
Founding Partner and Chairman
jalloriente@llorenteycuenca.com

Enrique González
Partner and CFO
egonzalez@llorenteycuenca.com

Adolfo Corujo
Partner and Chief Talent and
Innovation Officer
acorujo@llorenteycuenca.com

Carmen Gómez
Corporate Director
cgomez@llorenteycuenca.com

MANAGEMENT - AMERICAS

Alejandro Romero
Partner and CEO Americas
aromero@llorenteycuenca.com

Luisa García
Partner and COO Latin America
lgarcia@llorenteycuenca.com

Erich de la Fuente
Partner and CEO United States
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

José Luis Di Girolamo
Partner and CFO Latin America
jldgirolamo@llorenteycuenca.com

TALENT MANAGEMENT

Daniel Moreno
Chief Talent
dmoreno@llorenteycuenca.com

Marjorie Barrientos
Talent Manager for Andes' Region
mbarrientos@llorenteycuenca.com

Eva Pérez
Talent Manager for North
America, Central America and
Caribbean
eperez@llorenteycuenca.com

Karina Sanches
Talent Manager for
the Southern Cone
ksanches@llorenteycuenca.com

SPAIN AND PORTUGAL

Arturo Pinedo
Partner and Managing Director
apinedo@llorenteycuenca.com

Goyo Panadero
Partner and Managing Director
gpanadero@llorenteycuenca.com

Barcelona

María Cura
Partner and Managing Director
mcura@llorenteycuenca.com

Muntaner, 240-242, 1º-1ª
08021 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 217 22 17

Madrid

Joan Navarro
Partner and Vice-president
of Public Affairs
jnavarro@llorenteycuenca.com

Amalio Moratalla
Partner and Senior Director
amoratalla@llorenteycuenca.com

Jordi Sevilla
Vice-president of Economic Context
jsevilla@llorenteycuenca.com

Latam Desk
Claudio Vallejo
Senior Director
cvallejo@llorenteycuenca.com

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3
28001 Madrid
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

Impossible Tellers

Ana Folgueira
Managing Director
ana@impossibletellers.com

Impossible Tellers
Diego de León, 22, 3º izq
28006 Madrid
Tel. +34 91 438 42 95

Cink

Sergio Cortés
Partner, Founder and Chairman
scortes@cink.es

Muntaner, 240, 1º-1ª
08021 Barcelona
Tel. +34 93 348 84 28

Lisbon

Tiago Vidal
Managing Director
tvidal@llorenteycuenca.com

Avenida da Liberdade nº225, 5º Esq.
1250-142 Lisbon
Tel. + 351 21 923 97 00

UNITED STATES

Miami

Erich de la Fuente
Partner and Managing Director
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

600 Brickell Ave.
Suite 2020
Miami, FL 33131
Tel. +1 786 590 1000

New York City

Latam Desk
Erich de la Fuente
edela Fuente@llorenteycuenca.com

Abernathy MacGregor
277 Park Avenue, 39th Floor
New York, NY 10172
Tel. +1 212 371 5999 (ext. 374)

Washington, DC

Ana Gamonal
Director
agamonal@llorenteycuenca.com

10705 Rosehaven Street
Fairfax, VA 22030
Washington, DC
Tel. +1 703 505 4211

MEXICO, CENTRAL AMERICA AND CARIBBEAN

Mexico City

Juan Arteaga
Managing Director
jarteaga@llorenteycuenca.com

Rogelio Blanco
Managing Director
rblanco@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Paseo de la Reforma 412, Piso 14,
Col. Juárez, Del. Cuauhtémoc
CP 06600, Mexico City
Tel. +52 55 5257 1084

Havana

Pau Solanilla
Managing Director
psolanilla@llorenteycuenca.com

Lagasca, 88 - planta 3
28001 Madrid
Tel. +34 91 563 77 22

Panama City

Javier Rosado
Partner and Managing Director
jrosado@llorenteycuenca.com

Sortis Business Tower, piso 9
Calle 57, Obarrio - Panamá
Tel. +507 206 5200

Santo Domingo

Iban Campo
Managing Director
icampo@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Abraham Lincoln 1069
Torre Ejecutiva Sonora, planta 7
Tel. +1 809 6161975

ANDES' REGION

Bogota

María Esteve
Partner and Managing Director
mesteve@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Calle 82 # 9-65 Piso 4
Bogotá D.C. - Colombia
Tel. +57 1 7438000

Lima

Luis Miguel Peña
Partner and Senior Director
lmpena@llorenteycuenca.com

Humberto Zogbi
Chairman
hzogbi@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Andrés Reyes 420, piso 7
San Isidro
Tel. +51 1 2229491

Quito

Alejandra Rivas
Managing Director
arivas@llorenteycuenca.com

Avda. 12 de Octubre N24-528 y
Cordero - Edificio World Trade
Center - Torre B - piso 11
Tel. +593 2 2565820

Santiago de Chile

Claudio Ramírez
Partner and General Manager
cramirez@llorenteycuenca.com

Magdalena 140, Oficina 1801.
Las Condes.
Tel. +56 22 207 32 00

SOUTH AMERICA

Buenos Aires

Daniel Valli
Managing Director and
Senior Director of New Business
Development for the Southern Cone
dvalli@llorenteycuenca.com

Av. Corrientes 222, piso 8. C1043AAP
Tel. +54 11 5556 0700

Rio de Janeiro

Maira da Costa
Director
mdacosta@llorenteycuenca.com

Rua da Assembleia, 10 - Sala 1801
RJ - 20011-000
Tel. +55 21 3797 6400

Sao Paulo

Marco Antonio Sabino
Partner and Brazil Chairman
masabino@llorenteycuenca.com

Juan Carlos Gozzer
Managing Director
jcgozzer@llorenteycuenca.com

Rua Oscar Freire, 379, Cj 111,
Cerqueira César SP - 01426-001
Tel. +55 11 3060 3390



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