
Managing relationships in open business models: The case of Spain's elBulli restaurant

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Abstract

Small Catalan restaurant, elBulli, can claim to have been the most famous restaurant in the world when it closed its doors in 2011. Its reputation was conspicuous for a decade thanks to a number of consecutive awards as the best world restaurant from top restaurant magazines, and media coverage that transcended the world of haute cuisine. This article suggests that the key to elBulli's prominent reputation was its relationship management as an open business model. Open business models are mainly characterised by two functions: they create value, and they capture a portion of that value by selling it to others (Chesbrough, 2006). This article argues that elBulli's business model was based on the expansion and management of relationships with non-traditional publics beyond avant-garde restaurant audiences, such as scientists, artists, business schools, and worldwide consumers whom it never expected would visit the restaurant as patrons. The social capital garnered through the use of symbolic and behavioural communication enabled elBulli to profit from getting involved in other business ventures despite the weak financial results of the restaurant itself.

Introduction

At the beginning of the 21st Century, elBulli was considered by a number of food critics to be the best restaurant in the world. It was without precedent that *Restaurant* magazine, considered the most influential magazine by many in the dining field, elected elBulli best restaurant in the world five times. The

success of elBulli meant that its head chef, Ferrán Adrià, was simultaneously considered the best chef in the world and the media attention paid to him was considerable for an haute cuisine chef. Indeed, Colman Andrews (2010), a former editor-in-chief of *Saveur* and restaurant columnist for *Gourmet*, said “no chef in history has been interviewed, written about, and parsed” (p. ix) more than Adrià, who, aware of the importance of creating media hype for haute cuisine restaurants, made the claim that he was giving 1,000 interviews per year. Adrià arguably received significant international recognition through cover appearances on *The New York Times*, *Le Monde*, and *Time* magazine. In 2004, this last publication included him on its list as one of the 100 most influential people in the world.

The prominence of elBulli in the mainstream media has been maintained despite Ferrán Adrià's numerous critics. For example, in 2008, another chef with three Michelin stars, Santi Santamaría, questioned Adrià's pride in “a cuisine... that fills its dishes with laboratory-made emulsifiers and gelificants” (Ethel, 2008, para. 2), a statement that generated great controversy in the world of haute cuisine. Likewise, *Washington Post* art critic Blake Gopnik critiqued Adrià as an artist, writing of elBulli's cuisine that “for an art critic, it still feels like a bare start” (Gopnik, 2009, p.3, para. 5). There are also a number of critics of elBulli who only see the restaurant as a marketing device, including one person who commented on the *Sunday Times* website:

Wow a business that is only open for 6 months a year! And he has people

begging him to let them patronise his business. Ha ha, what a scam! Sure it's 'The Best Restaurant in the World' (rolling eyes). It is called 'marketing' folks. You make your product rare, jack up the price and tell everyone how exclusive it is, and all the knuckleheads with more money than sense will kill each other to be seen buying your wares. All you need is a friendly newspaper or two to promote your stuff. Piece of cake! (Cited in Andrews, 2010, p. 220).

Literature on CEO reputation suggests that the contribution of CEOs and leaders who are visible and generate a confident aura can influence organisational reputation positively (Gaines-Ross, 2000), but also that the high profile of top executives can be "a double-edged sword" (Bruijns, 2003, p. 1), full of risks if these executives make serious mistakes. Therefore, we must conclude that, while overall the general opinion about Adrià has been more positive than negative, both aspects of his profile will influence the restaurant's image, especially taking into consideration that the identification of elBulli with Adrià has always been strong. According to Andrews (2010), elBulli only became world famous when, in 2003, *New York Times Magazine* had a 7,000-word cover story built around Adrià. Therefore, it should be acknowledged that any criticism of Adrià is a criticism of elBulli and vice versa, because, paraphrasing Pincus, Rayfield, and Debonis (1991), Adrià is intertwined with elBulli both symbolically and literally.

Adrià has claimed (with apparent pride) to have violated the most elementary marketing rules (Andrews, 2010). According to Adrià, elBulli had no marketing or public relations operations (his partner and the dining room manager handled all media relations on an informal basis) (Andrews, 2010). Moreover, Adrià has emphasised that he did not care whether or not customers liked his product (Hanna, 2009). "Creativity comes first", he has said, "then comes the customer" (Norton, Villanueva & Wathieu, 2007, p. 8). And yet, despite high customer demand leading to long

wait-lists, elBulli did not reach a break-even point financially because the restaurant was inefficient, with too many staff and very few hours of operation (Sandulli & Chesbrough, 2009). This lack of profitability is not, however, unusual in the world of three-Michelin-star restaurants.

Nonetheless, elBulli leveraged its reputation to attain profitability through other business ventures, such as the publication of numerous books, a catering service, cooking training sessions around the world, a hotel, a franchised fast food chain and collaborations with 15 multinationals – Borges, Lavazza coffee, Lays potato chips, and Diageo's J&B whisky, among others – marketing products from vinegar to potato chips (Prats, Quintanilla & Mitchell, 2008).

This article argues for the importance of elBulli's relationship management strategy in the construction of its reputation and overall financial success. ElBulli is an example of an open business model which, in opposition to traditional business models focused on value creation through the use of a company's internal resources, is defined by the capacity of a business to create value and capture a portion of that value by selling it to others (Chesbrough, 2006). Sandulli and Chesbrough (2009) argue that, historically, most companies have tried to develop their resources and exploit them internally within the limits of their own business model. In recent years, companies that operate in complex environments, such as IBM, Amazon, Merck or Philips, have realised they cannot develop all the resources internally that they need to succeed.

Open business models are easier to implement when the resources shared by the company are not subject to rivalry or restricted. That is to say, their sharing does not function to the detriment of the lender, who is able to capture some of the value created by the third party (Sandulli & Chesbrough, 2009). For this reason, it will be more common to observe business models based on assets such as brand, know-how and intellectual property.

Open business models work when small businesses develop collective brands to reduce the costs of marketing and communication

(Falcone, 2007). Sandulli and Chesbrough (2009) suggest that was the case of a number of small textile companies in Costa Rica that used the social network Hi5 to develop the fashion brand Abril. Open business models are frequent in the telecommunications industry where mobile telecommunication operators share their networks with application developers. This decision generally increases the number of services offered by the network, the value of its resource and, therefore, the number of potential distributors interested in distributing carrier services (Sandulli & Chesbrough, 2009).

This relationship model seems to square particularly well with the conditions of late or “liquid modernity” (Bauman, 2006), characterised by a condition in which social forms (and this includes all kinds of organisations and enterprises) can no longer keep their shape and “decompose and melt faster than the time it takes to cast them” (Bauman, 2007, p. 1). ElBulli closed its doors in 2011 and will reopen again in 2014 in an as-yet undefined new format, possibly a non-profit foundation or think tank where chefs will investigate new cooking techniques in conjunction with other forms of art (Abend, 2010). This new project, and the expectation created by it, is possible thanks to the social capital, or its ability to create, maintain, and use relationships to achieve its goals (Portes, 1998), accumulated by elBulli over the years.

Theoretical framework

The modern practice of public relations is understood as strategic management of communication and relationships between organisations and their publics (Cutlip, Center, & Broom, 1994; Dozier, L. Grunig & J. Grunig, 1995). There is a clear connection between public relations and the culinary avant-garde. Changes in food culture, globalisation, and the media landscape have transformed chefs into superstars who build their reputations on their restaurants and become profitable by consulting for food companies, giving speeches, and participating in television cooking programmes. Building a

reputation requires maintaining relationships not only with diners, but also with other audiences including ranking companies and institutions, governments, sponsors, and the media. The success of restaurants is measured not only by customer satisfaction and draw but also on ranking metrics, a main indicator of reputational quality (Power, Scheytt, Soin & Sahlin, 2009). For example, the receipt of three stars in the Michelin Guide, considered one of the ‘bibles’ of haute cuisine for food connoisseurs, usually means more customers, more publicity, more media attention and more institutional support from local and regional governments; for example by including that restaurant in their tourism promotional materials.

There are a number of reputation definitions from different perspectives (Helm, 2005). From a public relations perspective, Grunig and Hung (2002) defined reputation as a cognitive representation in the minds of different stakeholders, while Sung and Yang (2009) conceptualised reputation as a collective phenomenon. In the field of management, reputation is conceptualised as a manageable resource for the company that creates a competitive advantage (Dowling, 2006; Fombrun, 1996). Other approaches have focused on corporate social responsibility, crisis and issues management, branding of products, and services. Furthermore, business scholars have studied reputation as the evaluation of financial investment (Mahon, 2002).

Relationship management builds the reputation needed to reach financial success. Kennan and Hazleton (2000) explained how the relationships created through organisational behaviour and public relations are transformed into other types of monetary capital. Grunig and Huang (2000) suggested that relationship building with strategic publics not only saves money for the organisation but also helps to make money by cultivating relationships with a number of publics. Ledingham (2003, 2006) argued that, as a management function, public relations would be responsible for organisational wealth creation and, if misused, its loss. Grunig (2006) emphasised how public

relations as a strategic management function influences financial as well as nonfinancial factors such as reputation. There are a number of studies that, with a public relations approach, show how reputation is affected by relationships. Grunig and Hung (2002) demonstrated that reputation can be explained by the behaviour of the organisation and the quality of relationships with publics. Yang (2005, 2007) and Yang and Grunig (2005) expanded this research and developed structural equation models showing the correlation between relationship outcomes and the quality of the reputation. This view of public relations applies to the haute cuisine world, where cash value and reputation usually only come after a long and arduous process of relationship building.

The concept of social capital from relationship management seems particularly relevant when considering open business models such as elBulli's. The firm's business model identifies the resources that create value for a target market, as well as the network of relationships within the ecosystem of the company that allow the construction of these valuable resources (Chesbrough & Rosenbloom, 2002). In the cooking world, sharing a resource (for example, cooking techniques) with another restaurant does not reduce the value created by that resource in the firm's own business model. Indeed, if this transfer of knowledge is well publicised and acknowledged it can increase a restaurant's reputation significantly.

Methodology

This article uses an historical-critical method to analyse elBulli's relationship management over the course of nearly a decade, a period that can be situated between the publication of the cover story on elBulli in the *New York Times* in 2003, when elBulli reached its worldwide reputation according to Andrews (2010), and the voluntary closing of its doors in 2011. The article analyses the relevant literature on open business models as well as elBulli's business model, interviews with Ferrán Adrià, books and documentaries on elBulli, and public relations theory on

relationship management and social capital. This holistic approach describes the different types of relationships forged by elBulli over the years, their role in building elBulli's reputation and how reputation and relationships have contributed to the viability of elBulli as a business.

This article is a case study on the importance of relationship management in elBulli's trajectory. Case studies are not defined as a method with hard-and-fast rules, but "as an intensive study of a single unit for the purpose of understanding a larger class of (similar) units" (Gerring, 2004, p. 342). Despite their inherent weaknesses – case studies can often end up portraying campaigns as coherent and well-planned systematic efforts although they generally are complex and involve ongoing management challenges – case studies show their suitability to illustrate particular developments in the public relations profession (Jaques, 2009).

Case study data analysis, however, has its limitations. It does not establish an empirical correlation between relationship management efforts and the enhancement of reputation and financial results, however it can signal trends. There are other factors that can be considered relevant, such as politics (e.g. the link between elBulli and the Spanish and Catalan governments), economics, and the rise of gastronomy as a trending topic across the world in recent times, among other factors.

A public relations approach to the restaurant business

Ferrán Adrià liked to think of the act of eating in elBulli as an event (Paterniti, 2001). Indeed, elBulli's management had several ways to create that feeling. First, according to Norton et al. (2007), there was a mysterious reservation process that nobody completely understood. Second, the restaurant was located in a small village two hours by car from Barcelona, up a curvy and winding road that was not particularly well marked. This isolated location created what one reviewer described as a "hypnotical effect when one crosses over the restaurant's door, accentuated when you meet with the employers whose appearance creates the impression of being in a magic castle,

suspended in time and space” (Carlin, 2007, para. 9). Third, every diner was invited to see the kitchen and greet Adrià. “First-time guests are usually surprised but flattered by the offer, wondering modestly if perhaps the staff has detected some level of sophistication or other special quality that warrants such an invitation” (Abend, 2011, p. 93). As a result, the most memorable moment for many diners was not the food but a brief meeting and a picture with Ferrán Adrià. And last but not least, the food itself. In elBulli the diner did not know what to expect. The only thing diners knew was that to eat through the entire meal of 30-35 dishes took six hours (from 8 p.m. to 2 a.m.). They did not know what they were going to eat. Indeed, Adrià prided himself on not meeting customers’ expectations. He claimed that some dishes were “magic” (Abend, 2011, p. 131) and acclaimed them as great cuisine even if they would be hated by 30% of elBulli’s public.

Norton notes that “Adrià’s idea is that if you listen to the customers, what they tell you they want will be based on something they already know...it will never be a once-in-a-lifetime experience. To create those experiences, you almost can’t listen to the customer” (in Hanna, 2009, para. 5). This reaches such an extreme that during the serving of many dishes, the waiters take time to explain to guests how to eat the food (Prats et al., 2008). Indeed, Adrià describes cooking as a dialogue with his publics that requires some effort on their part to create a symmetrical relationship:

When you cook, you create a conversation with the diner. With avant-garde cooking, you create a new language for this conversation. To do that, your first job is to create a new alphabet. Then you can make words, then you can make sentences. As a diner, you have to be willing to understand this new language (Andrews, 2010, p. 24).

Therefore, the mutually beneficial relationship between elBulli and its customers was based on the unexpected, that is to say, that diners were given a supposedly unique

experience rather than what they already thought they wanted or liked, while elBulli’s team built trust with its publics around the idea of creativity.

Nevertheless, much of elBulli’s success in terms of business and reputation was based on relationship management with publics from other fields. Adrià has acknowledged this in his media interviews. “One of the big reasons why elBulli is where it is because we talk to other disciplines. We are seeing the revolution of communications in cooking,” he said (CNN, 2011, para. 2). This network of allied individuals and organisations spans the worlds of art, science, politics, chefs, and reaches out to non-traditional haute cuisine consumers.

As described by relationship management theory, this relationship management process has taken place through the use of both symbolic communication and behavioural communication. Symbolic communication is defined as what the organisation says about itself, whereas behavioural communication stems from an organisation’s actions. Despite his critics’ distaste for Adrià’s ‘effervescent’ communication and cooking style, it can be argued that, over the long term, elBulli’s image – understood as perception, cognition, attitude, and schema – has contributed to elBulli’s behavioural relationships with publics, and ultimately to the financial and reputational objectives of the restaurant.

This process has been a two-way street because often the actions and behaviours resulting from elBulli’s industrial management have preceded symbolic communication. For example, Adrià’s participation in art shows was not initially a deliberate public relations effort but a product of the recognition by some of the artistic value of elBulli’s molecular gastronomy. Subsequent symbolic communication enhanced the behaviour and not vice versa. As Grunig (1993) argues, symbolic communication can improve a behavioural relationship, but a poor behavioural relationship can only weaken attempts to communicate a symbolic positive relationship. ElBulli’s social capital of public relationships has not, in great measure, been given thanks to its communication but rather to its public

behaviours, a concept central to the relationship management perspective (Ledingham, 2003). All the hype in the mainstream and trade press arose because Adrià or elBulli behaved to stimulate it: he did not participate in events that were just mediatic but those that added value to the business with all the suspicious connotations that terms such as creativity or experimentation may have in this type of context. Therefore, although in a perhaps unconscious way, we can give credit to Adrià and his team for having understood that maintaining organisation–public relationships includes “symbolic and behavioral initiatives, as well as personal, professional, and community related relationships” (Ledingham, 2006, p. 420).

It is important to point out that this relationship management approach is not unique to elBulli; other top restaurants and chefs (for example, Wolfgang Puck and Jamie Oliver) have followed the same approach, but the fact that they don't compete in the restrictive world of avant-garde cuisine makes it difficult to directly compare.

Relationships with the arts

One of Adrià's favourite sentences is chef Maximin's simple phrase, “creativity means not copying” (Planellas & Svenejova, 2007, p. 5). During his time at elBulli, Adrià has consistently tried to build bridges between the worlds of gastronomy and the arts. These collaborations have been fruitful in at least two ways: as a source of creativity, and in expanding elBulli's reputation further beyond the relatively limited boundaries of the avant-garde food world.

For example, in 1992, thinking that his own creative process could benefit from exposure to somebody else's, Adrià spent several weeks at the studio of the Catalan sculptor Xavier Medina-Campeny cooking dishes while Medina worked. They ate those dishes for lunch and dinner. After the time spent together, they collaborated on a notebook recording Adrià's menus, illustrated with sketches, pictures, poetry, and music (elBulli.com, 2011). This collaboration received copious media coverage.

Other examples of collaboration with the art world have come through events. In 2005, Adrià participated in an exhibition at the Centre Pompidou in Paris, and in 2007 he presented some of his creations at Documenta, a contemporary art event held every five years in Kassel, Germany. Adrià also collaborated with French musician Bruno Mantovani, who wrote a 29-minute orchestra piece presented at the Salle Pleyel in Paris. On the day of the event, the conductor and Adrià took the stage to describe the origins and structure of several dishes with the music in the background.

Relationships with the sciences

The expansion of elBulli's activities into the domain of the sciences impacted the restaurant's conception of cuisine as well as its position in the world of restaurants. The restaurant and Adrià were known for investigations in ‘molecular gastronomy’, now being imitated in many places around the world. This type of knowledge is only possible in an open business model (Sandulli & Chesbrough, 2009). For example, Adrià imported techniques from Hervé This, a French physical chemist. At the same time, Adrià used his developments to build relationships with worldwide centres of science such as Harvard's School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. There he established a programme for cooperation between students and professors that also involved the Fundación Alicia (an acronym for *alimentación y ciencia*, which means nutrition and science in Spanish), a non-profit institution created in part by the Catalan Government for the study of nutrition and science.

In December 2008, Adrià spoke about the relationship between food and science to a packed auditorium at Harvard for almost three full hours; Abend (2011) reports that campus police had to control the crowd. He finished his tour of Harvard with a 30-course dinner, in homage to elBulli, with a group of Harvard scientists and journalists. The collaboration between elBulli and Harvard includes transferring students from Harvard to Alicia and organising lectures and events where chefs and scientists talk about the relationship between food and science.

This was not Adrià's first contact with the world of science and academia. In 2005, he became involved in research on topics such as nutrition and food composition with the creation of Ferrán Adrià's University Chair at the School of Gastronomic Culture and Food Science at the Camilo José Cela University in Madrid. Chesbrough (2006) suggests that a "vital source for accessing external ideas is to cultivate deep and ongoing relationships with universities" (p. 73). Indeed, many companies take the time to identify faculty experts in fields that are potentially useful for them. In this sense, in terms of reputation, the collaboration with prestigious universities such as Harvard creates a network of mutually beneficial relationships and synergies for both organisations that also attracts the interest of the business world.

Relationships with politics

Arguably, it was a logical step for local and national governments to try to capitalise on elBulli's prestige and reputation as a flagship of Spanish cooking. In Spain, the third-top international tourist destination, where tourism represents more than 10% of the Gross National Product (Page, 2010), helping to promote Spain as a tourist destination is perceived as a 'patriotic duty' and an example of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). A benefit for elBulli is that participation in institutional campaigns offers visibility among a large public.

Spanish authorities have called on Adrià for promotional efforts both abroad and locally. In 2010, Spain's Secretary of Tourism appointed Adrià Ambassador of the Brand Spain, an honour usually reserved for opera singers such as Plácido Domingo or José Carreras, and sports figures such as Rafael Nadal or Pau Gasol. In the ad campaign, wearing an elegant chef's jacket and posing like a juggler, Adrià plays with several vegetables against a backdrop with the slogan, "here art is not only in museums",

and the signature of the "most influential chef in the world".¹

Adrià has also participated in an advertising campaign used by the Catalan Regional Government to increase the number of tourists from the rest of Spain to Catalonia. In the spots, Adrià appears with other Catalan personalities referring to aspects that ideally have to do with the Catalan personality. Adrià says, "I am a fan of creativity"² in a spot aired on all the main Spanish broadcast channels.

These two campaigns have made Adrià popular beyond haute cuisine aficionados—he is now recognisable to the average person on the street in Spain, which certainly increases the interest of brands and businesses in working with him, and ultimately contributes towards making elBulli a sustainable project.

Relationships with haute cuisine

One explanation for Adrià's influence in the haute cuisine world is his dissemination of knowledge. In an industry with no copyright protection enforcement, the publication of multiple books contributed both to elBulli's influence as well as to copyright protection for recipes and techniques. "The only way we have to combat plagiarism is by publishing our books. In these, we set out our recipes, how each dish is made, etc. Basically, it is like patenting our recipes" (Molina, 2005, p. 38). The process of analysing and describing how recipes emerged had never before been undertaken in such detail in the culinary domain (Prats, et al., 2008). Numerous books have come out of elBulli. The most ambitious and innovative has been a series of voluminous and expensive tomes called the 'general catalogue', exhibiting all the dishes that Adrià and his team have created over the years. Six volumes comprising more than 2,400 pages and supported by more than eight hours of audiovisual material contain the restaurant's creations from 1998 to present.

The books have been published in a number of languages (Spanish, Catalan, English,

¹ To see the ad, go to

<http://www.elBulli.com/historia/index.php?lang=es&seccion=8&subseccion=12>

² This video can be accessed at http://wn.com/Sóc_fan_de_Catalunya

French, German, and Japanese). In a world as secretive as that of international haute cuisine, Adrià's purpose with this exhaustive collection of recipes and techniques has been to create a record of his restaurant's achievements. "We know how to make all the dishes of traditional French cuisine and nouvelle cuisine," he said to his biographer, "but with very few exceptions, we don't know who created them, or when, or how" (Andrews, 2010, p. 202).

Maximum transparency has been a premise that explains elBulli's success. Besides the general catalogue, elBulli has opened its doors through multiple books and documentaries. In *A day at elBulli: An insight into the ideas, methods and creativity of Ferrán Adrià* (F. Adrià, Soler, & A. Adrià, 2008), the chef talks openly about the dynamic and creative processes of the restaurant. *A day at elBulli* includes 600 pages of pictures of finished dishes but also detail of the people and the places where they were created. More than 1,200 pictures with this and other materials are also offered on elBulli's multilingual website in Spanish, Catalan, and English (<http://www.elBulli.com>).

Adrià has frequently allowed journalists to spend long periods in the restaurant with unrestricted access to the dining room and the kitchen. Such was the case for Colman Andrews (2010), who wrote a biography of Adrià, and for Lisa Abend (2011) who stayed in elBulli for an entire six-month season to write *The Sorcerer's Apprentice* about the life of elBulli's stagiaires (trainee or intern chefs working for free at the restaurant). In Abend's book the public can learn intimate details about the stagiaires, elBulli's staff, and Adrià himself. Although the portrait in part demystifies the image of glamour created by elBulli, it also emphasises positive aspects such as the creativity and passion involved. ElBulli's worldwide reputation will likely be magnified when, as has been announced, Hollywood makes a movie based on Abend's book. In this movie, in which real meals will be shown being prepared and served, there

will be a mix of real and fictional chefs (Pantaleoni, 2011).

This transparency and accessibility of knowledge have permitted elBulli to solidify its reputation and leadership in the cooking world in a way that rankings cannot. Rather than shrouding innovative techniques in secrecy, elBulli welcomes top chefs who want to learn first-hand the latest techniques as stagiaires, including experienced cooks working in other three-Michelin restaurants, who work for free in elBulli for short periods of time.

Relationships with society

Despite being in the elitist business of avant-garde cooking, elBulli has tried to build a reputation around the idea of accessibility to the people. Surprisingly for many, the most sophisticated and awarded restaurant in the world was relatively inexpensive in comparison with less famous and awarded restaurants. The average cost was 250 Euros for a 30- to 35-course meal. Adrià claims the lack of profitability of elBulli has to do with a democratic spirit where business is not the main priority. A few years ago Adrià said, "I could charge a thousand Euros for the meal and still book every seat. But that's not the character of elBulli. We began serving fishermen. I want a fisherman to be able to eat here, even now" (Matthews, 2004, p. 36). Although such a statement may sound demagogic, it is true that in comparison to other avant-garde restaurants, elBulli's management has always emphasised building relationships with a wide spectrum of people. In her book, Abend (2011) illustrates this with the anecdote of a local taxi driver who each year saves up his money to be invited for a meal at elBulli. Real or fictional – Abend (2011) also writes repeatedly of the military discipline and barely human schedules of the restaurant – a certain bohemian spirit is still a part of elBulli's reputation. "You don't make money with avant-garde cuisine. This is not a business. We could auction reservations on eBay. But that would be prostitution", Adrià has said (CNN, 2011, para. 10).

Indeed, elBulli's efforts to connect with wider society have focused on two aspects usually confined to big food companies selling high consumption products: educating about

healthy eating habits among present-day and future generations, and fast quality cooking.

The projects, already mentioned in this article, with Alicia and the University Camilo José Cela, have been a relevant part of the restaurant's work over the last few years. The topic of nutrition, however, looks set to become one of the main axes of the elBulli operation once the restaurant is closed. On numerous occasions, Adrià has referred to the role of nutrition in the prevention of obesity and other diseases. His new restaurant-foundation, a think tank about gastronomy and nutrition that will open in 2014, can be understood as an example of symbolic communication by using CSR to build relationships with wider society based on sharing knowledge. In a somewhat grandiloquent way, Adrià describes it as “a chamber like a giant filing cabinet full of every idea and experiment we can think of. It will be a record for all humanity and for all time of what we do here at elBulli” (Govan, 2011, para. 11). ElBulli aims to transform itself into a new organisation whose mission will be to disseminate information to the wider world. “We have enjoyed great luck and now it's time to give back to society” (Govan, 2011, para. 13), Adrià said.

Other popular approaches demonstrate the interweaving of relationship management and business. For example, in 2003 Adrià and his team published *Cuinar a casa amb Caprabo I Ferrán Adrià (Cook at home with Caprabo and Ferrán Adrià)* with very simple recipes that can be prepared after doing the grocery shopping in the local Caprabo supermarket (or any other similar supermarket in Spain). In 2004, Adrià published a DVD collection called *La cocina fácil de Ferrán Adrià (Ferrán Adrià's easy cuisine)* offering easy tips for everyday cooking.

To offer wider public access to the restaurant's philosophy and dishes, elBulli has forged a number of business projects that have generated strong publicity and reinforced synergies. In 1995, elBulli started elBulliacatering to offer some restaurant dishes at events. In 2004, Adrià developed a fast-food chain called Fast Good, applying a

dignified concept of fast food. The hotel chain NH followed this project with NHube, offering traditional Spanish food in a modern setting. In 2006, Adrià's brother Albert Adrià, also a chef at elBulli, opened Inopia Classic Bar, a return to the origins of tapas bars with moderately priced dishes, in one of Barcelona's more modest neighbourhoods.

Adrià's relationships with society at large have already involved the entertainment industry. In 2007, he had a cameo in the movie *Tapas*, which was shot in his quintessentially blue-collar hometown of L'Hospitalet de Llobregat. That same year Adrià participated in the local dubbed version of *Ratatouille*, giving his voice to one of the characters as well as advising about culinary terms.

In sum, elBulli's commitment to relationship management has made use of symbolic and behavioural communication as described by relationship management theory (Grunig, 1993; Ledingham, 2003, 2006). This has affected its organisational planning in two ways. First, engaging elBulli through open communication with its different and expanded publics has been good for the mutual creation of value with artists, scientists, governments, consumers, and even other restaurants. Second, shaping elBulli's policies toward strategic business decisions has kept the role of communication present (Bowen, Rowlin, & Martin, 2010) in the reputation building process. Together, applying Bruning and Ledingham's (2000) words, elBulli has “invested in the interests of other businesses in the relationship, is involved in furthering both its own as well as other businesses' interests, and is committed to not only its own welfare but also that of other businesses in the relationship” (p. 169). Replacing the term “publics” for the more restrictive “businesses” suggests a model for what elBulli has been doing for almost a decade.

Conclusions

This article highlights the applicability and effectiveness of public relations' relationship management philosophy in the management of open business organisations. ElBulli has set a new standard for organisations that want to use

open communication and transparency in their business model. Theoretically, elBulli is just a restaurant and Ferrán Adrià just a chef. Both, however, have a reputation that broadly transcends the world of avant-garde cuisine thanks to the use of symbolic and behavioural communication. This latter form of communication expands elBulli's relationships to other fields, such as art and science, taking advantage of the creativity and innovation in which elBulli's business model is based. The use of symbolic communication through a mainstream media presence improves and solidifies the reputation of elBulli in order to offer consulting services and develop elBulli's own businesses. The accumulated social capital of relationships created by the multiple business and reputation synergies has enabled elBulli to transform its business model from a restaurant to a diversified operation including publishing, branding and endorsements, and a non-profit foundation where chefs will work together with scientists, artists, and other segments of society to build new relationships.

This business-communication dyad cannot be exported to all organisations. Open business models are easier when the resources shared by the firm – in this case creative philosophy and cooking techniques – are not rivalrous, that is to say, their use by others does not detract from the value created by the firm, as in elBulli's case. The ability to develop relationship programmes that provide a mutual benefit for both organisations and/or publics is obviously higher than when there is rivalry for resources.

Despite this, relationship management approaches in the case of an open business model like elBulli's face several challenges. A future challenge for elBulli is how to preserve its reputation as a non-profit organisation no longer included in restaurant rankings. The lack of official reputation measurement methods may decrease elBulli's organisational orientation toward creativity and, therefore, make elBulli less appealing for potential relationship partners.

Either way, to date elBulli's organisation-public relationship dimensions of openness, transparency, and social commitment have contributed to forging relationships with non-traditional avant-garde restaurant publics such as scientists, artists, and business academics, enhancing its reputation and generating additional cash sources from the business world.

Future research can build on the present article by analysing the differences in relationship management approaches with other open business models from other industries. For example, in the software industry it is not unusual for companies (for example, Intel or IBM) to voluntarily donate portions of their intellectual property, so that the company and others can practice their technologies freely without fear of being sued for patent infringement. This can be taken as an act of CSR with their publics. Investigations along these lines could help initiate discussions about better practices in the area of relationship management for open business models, showing some practical examples of open communication reaping benefits for organisations and their publics.

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