

Politics as a topic of study in Hispanic communication journals

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Abstract: The goal of this paper is to observe the relationship between the areas of communication and politics, particularly exploring the way academic production has been verified by this intersection. Thus, we analyze how the articles published in the main Hispanic communication journals adopt the subject of politics over the five-year period 2013-2017. Through a methodological procedure that combines bibliometric analysis with meta-research, we collected data on the objects of study, the theories or the empirical techniques used in the 167 manuscripts comprised in the sample. The main results indicate an increasing trend in the annual number of publications and its consequent impact. From an operational point of view, the authors frequently turn to framing theory and content analysis to address political issues that are increasingly reported on social media.

Key words: communication, politics, meta-research, academic articles, Hispanic journals.

Resumen: Este trabajo tiene por objetivo observar las relaciones entre las áreas de la comunicación y la política, explorando, en particular, el modo mediante el cual la producción académica ha reflejado esta intersección. Analizamos cómo los artículos publicados en las principales revistas hispánicas de comunicación abordan la temática de la política durante el quinquenio 2013-2017. A través de un procedimiento metodológico que combina el análisis bibliométrico con la meta-investigación, tomamos datos sobre los objetos de estudio, las teorías o las técnicas empíricas empleadas en los 167 manuscritos que conforman la muestra. Los principales resultados indican una tendencia creciente en el número anual de publicaciones y su consiguiente impacto. Desde el punto de vista operativo, los autores recurren habitualmente a la teoría del *framing* y al análisis de contenido para abordar los asuntos políticos que, cada vez con más frecuencia, son divulgados a través de las redes sociales.

Palabras clave: comunicación, política, meta-investigación, artículos académicos, revistas hispánicas.

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Introduction¹

Recently, the relationship between communication and politics has again become of great interest to the academic community (Correia *et al.*, 2010; Restrepo-Echavarría, 2019; Sierra and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2020). Not intending to be exhaustive, some of the causes of this renewed attention lie, first of all, in the multiple transformations that have affected contemporary democratic societies and that have had a significant impact on political organizations, the media system and the role of citizens (Prior *et al.*, 2016). On the other hand, the mediatization and “spectacularization” of political life (politainment), and the range of possibilities that both information and communication technologies (ICT) and social media have introduced into the current situation (Campos-Domínguez, 2017) have served as spurs to promote plenty of scientific initiatives.

However, the purpose of the present study is not to examine each of these disciplines separately, but to observe the nature of their intersection. In particular, we are interested in the area located halfway between communication and politics, whose dynamics are based on certain epistemological precepts and methodological routines that are also inherent to other disciplines, such as political sociology, linguistics and even social psychology (Prior *et al.*, 2016).

Historically, the progressive introduction of universal suffrage and the prominence of the mass media in the political process (Correia *et al.*, 2010) were the main encouragement for the initial development of this field. More recently, the encounter of these disciplines has emerged works on election campaigns, the use of digital media by political actors, studies on marketing, journalism and politics, or research on civic deliberation, citizen participation and engagement (Ballesteros and Díez-Garrido, 2018; Muñoz *et al.*, 2016); the latter is very often linked to studies on Web 2.0.

Our work is located in this context, marked by the reconfiguration of existing relationships and the emergence of new connections, we explore the multiple research possibilities that flow from the confluence between communication and politics.

From this approach, Mancinas-Chávez *et al.* (2016: 242) claim that “the scientific dissemination of the research results carried out from all sciences and fields of knowledge is fundamental for the growth of each of the areas”.

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In this light, the level of academic production about an epistemological field acts as an indicator of its relevance and evolution over a specific period (Pérez-Montoro, 2016). Thus, in the present study we carried out a collection of articles disseminated over the main Hispanic communication journals during the five-year period 2013-2017, in order to identify the conceptual and instrumental lines that characterize these manuscripts. More specifically, we aimed to:

- SO₁: describe the specific production on political communication in bibliometric terms.
- SO₂: identify the core elements that support this production from the theoretical and methodological perspectives.
- SO₃: to compare the profile of the papers according to the journals geographical origin where they are published; namely, Spanish versus Latin America and Spain journals.

Regarding the structure of the article, in the first section we carry out a brief chronological review, pointing out the most important milestones on the union between communication and politics. Then, the most recent trends are addressed, among which the predominance of ICT and social media are notable. We conclude the state of the art with a discussion of the most widespread methodologies. The central part presents the strategy followed for the selection of the study sample and its consequent analysis, in addition to the statistical results obtained. Finally, the discussion of the main findings allows us to present conclusions, along with limitations and future lines of research.

State of the art

Milestones at the intersection between communication and politics

According to Rogers (2004), the precursors to the study of mass communication and political communication shared a common interest in the media effects; there was often a shift of researchers between the two currents. It should be noted that both traditions were conditioned from their emergence by the socio-political context of World War I (Jamieson and Kenski, 2017). Here, authors such as Lippmann (1922 and 1925) and Lasswell (1927) are distinguished, who in the 1920s and 1930s focused on the monitoring of propaganda and its consequences on public opinion.

After this initial phase, the fear of the outbreak of a new global war and the rise of extremist ideological movements (fascism and communism)

encouraged a more determined interest in those works that measured the perceptions of citizens and their possible manipulation (Robinson, 2019). Between the 1950s and 1960s, the Rockefeller Foundation was created, which would fund a large set of initiatives that aimed to understand the effects of the media on society (Karpf *et al.*, 2015). On the basis of this funding, projects such as the “Office of Radio Research” at the Columbia University emerged, not to mention the launch of the journal “Public Opinion Quarterly” (Robinson, 2019).

On the other hand, the work led by Lazarsfeld *et al.* (1968), “The People’s Choice”, is also particularly relevant. Through a set of surveys, these pioneers observed the impact of communication on voters during different campaigns, concluding that the media effects were more limited than previously thought. These findings, together with the trends linked to behaviorism (Rogers, 2004), would be the triggers for the launching of the journal “Political Communication”, as explained by Karpf *et al.* (2015), which began its journey in 1975 establishing itself into the first forum dedicated specially to the academic production on political communication.

In the 1970s and 1980s, this type of research began to draw on other areas such as psychology and political science, moving away from the initial sociological approach. The book “Handbook of Political Communication” (Nimmo and Sanders, 1981) contains a great of the theoretical precepts that defined the field, among which agenda-setting, framing and priming were already becoming prominent; and which also overshadowed the work of Lippmann (1922 and 1925) or Lasswell (1927), as well as the theories and methodologies used by them.²

The fact that it limits itself to a reduced set of conceptual and instrumental elements is a warning for the recent scientific community (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Bimber, 2015; Kparf *et al.*, 2015; Nielsen, 2014; Robinson, 2019), due to the difficulties of adapting the discipline to the new times. Consequently, the question that emerges is whether –contrary to the warnings of some experts– the political communication field is prepared to deal with the objects of analysis of the 21st century, as well as the consequent social and technological changes that are caused by them.

2 Lippmann’s or Lasswell’s lines of research referred to the influence of propaganda, the power of the media and the study of public opinion, through an addition of mixed methodologies that combined quantitative and qualitative techniques.

The importance of the Internet and social media in political communication

Following the theoretical and methodological perspectives favored since the end of the last century, and their notable limitations in adapting to digital environments, in this section we focus on the innovations that the new media have introduced into political communication. Likewise, another reason to focus on the importance of the Internet and above all social media is due to the fact that the period of analysis considered in this study (2013-2017) is marked by the impact of ICT in all spheres of society.

In the light of the various databases, among which Web of Science and Scopus stand out, scientific production in this area has considerably increased. According to Rodríguez-Estrada *et al.* (2017), the production from 2006 a 2016 in Scopus triples the volume of published papers compared to the previous decade. However, we must go back to the 1990s as the starting point of a new model of political communication that was already beginning to introduce the innovations resulting from the use of the Internet.

Later, as rightly pointed out by Rodríguez-Andrés (2016), Obama's two electoral campaigns (in 2008 and 2012) were paradigmatic cases of what has been called "political communication 2.0"; a model that has altered the hierarchical and vertical dynamics that had been established between political organizations, the media and the citizenry. This significant change was not lost on researches, who quickly began to pay attention to how "politicians are using the Internet, social media and, in general, new technologies in the framework of their communication and campaign strategies" (Rodríguez-Andrés, 2016: 2), since their interactions with the media and users is now much more horizontal and immediate.

Sierra and Rodríguez-Virgili (2020) analyzed articles published in four of the journals with the highest impact in the area, such as: "Journal of Communication", "New Media & Society", "Political Communication" and "International Journal of Press/Politics", with the purpose of observing the relationship between political communication and social media. Having been studied, a marked increase in the number of articles focusing on the political dimension of social media was found. Other significant findings referred to the empirical aspect of the manuscripts that tended to draw on those dominant theoretical paradigms, i.e. agenda-setting and framing. This is in line with the study by Chung *et al.* (2013), which stressed the relevance of both conceptual precepts in the field of communication in general. Likewise, Piñeiro-Naval and Mangana (2019) also noticed politics

as the most frequent topic in those articles that used framing theory in Hispanic communication journals; specifically, 26.9% of the 104 manuscripts examined during the decade from 2007 to 2016.

On the other hand, after a bibliometric analysis of 537 indexed articles in Scopus and published by Ibero-American researchers, Lotero-Echeverri *et al.* (2020) underscore the predominance of studies on digital communication and social media in the field of communication and public opinion. The preeminence of quantitative methods, such as content analysis (33.5%) and survey (26.4%), is also a characteristic feature of the sample studied by Lotero-Echeverri *et al.* (2020). In line with this finding, Sierra and Rodríguez-Virgili (2020) emphasize the quantitative nature of most of the studies, which allows us to move on to the next section of the paper.

New methodologies for the study of political communication?

As pointed out in previous sections, the new ICT-driven media ecosystem has been a great challenge at the theoretical level. As far as empirical procedures are concerned, “the specific question of method should be at the forefront of the academic debate on the future of political communication research” (Kparf *et al.*, 2015: 1890), since the challenges at this level are no less demanding than at the conceptual level.

Traditionally, this field of study has integrated tools developed by social psychology, certain elements of political science and others belonging to the mass communication current (Nielsen, 2014). This help to explain, partly, a positivist vision focused on the systematic use of quantitative methods aimed at measuring both media content and its effects on public opinion (Robinson, 2019).

This eminently quantitative aspect is once again shown in a meta-research carried out by Graber and Smith (2005), in which used a sample of 137 articles published from 2000 to 2003 in certain reference journals, such as: “American Political Science Review”, “American Journal of Political Science”, “Journal of Politics”, “Communication Research”, “Journal of Communication” and “Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly”. After the analysis, they conclude that electoral campaigns (15.3%) and the new media (10.2%) are the most common objects of study, and that “content analysis is still the most widely used method for analyzing political messages” (Graber and Smith, 2005: 491).

In the same vein, Kparf *et al.* (2015) selected a total of 258 articles published in “Political Communication” from 2003 to 2015. Of the total

corpus, only 16.7% of the papers are qualitative. On the other hand, their postulates are reinforced when they refer to an essential monograph entitled “Sourcebook for Political Communication Research” (Bucy and Holbert, 2013), since content analysis, surveys and experiments are abundant there, which allow very specific questions to be asked about political phenomena (Kparf *et al.*, 2015).

In their opinion, a greater use of qualitative methods would not imply abandoning the quantification of contents, processes and effects, but rather a greater acceptance to the combination of methods or “triangulation” (Denzin, 2012). However, Kparf *et al.* (2015) also argue that the implementation of these initiatives requires academics to be rigorously trained in both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to devise different questions to progress the field.

In summary, and closely linked to our objectives and to the findings from previous studies, we posed the following hypotheses and research questions:

- H_1 : there will be a steady increase in the number of articles published on political communication during the period 2013-2017.
- H_2 : the most common papers will be of an empirical nature.
- H_3 : the most widely used theories will have to do with framing and agenda-setting.
- H_4 : quantitative methods will outperform qualitative methods, with content analysis towering above them all.
- H_5 : the new media (ICT and social media) will be the context units that will play a leading role in the academic research.
- RQ_1 : will there be differences according to the geographical origin of the journals (Spain versus Latin America and Spain)?
- RQ_2 : will there be publication patterns characteristic of Spanish and Latin America and Spain production in political communication?

Methodology

In order to meet the stipulated objectives and answer the hypotheses and questions formulated, a meta-research was carried out:

A quantitative descriptive method linked to the content analysis techniques, especially designed to investigate how the scientific articles “format” is organized as a means of communication and dissemination among specialized audiences (Saperas and Carrasco-Campos, 2019: 222).

That is to say, a bibliometric study combined with a content analysis

of the academic articles reported on the main communication journals of the Hispanic field was proposed. According to Mancinas-Chávez *et al.* (2016: 255), “the spaces for disseminating research results in Spanish in the area of communication are insufficient”. For this reason, we resorted to the SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2018) repository, which contains the most prestigious journals, grouped by discipline and classified according to their impact factor. Thus, the sampling units were (ordered from highest to lowest impact): *Comunicar* [Communicate], *El Profesional de la Información* [The Information Professional], “Communication & Society”, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* [Latin Magazine of Social Communication], *Cuadernos.info*, *Comunicación y Sociedad* [Communication and Society] and *Palabra Clave* [Keyword].

These seven journals are the most prominent in the period from 2013 to 2017, as all of them were in the first or second quartile of the ranking during the last year considered. The units of analysis represented a sample of $n = 167$ manuscripts, $\sim 11\%$ of the total of the $N = 1548$ articles published in the selected five-year period in these journals (Piñeiro-Naval and Morais, 2019). After a thorough review by the authors of the study, this sample was extracted from the total universe because the works in question alluded precisely to the political dimension of communication. The parameters on which this extraction was based are related (among others) to thematic and conceptual axes reviewed in the initial section: political communication, election campaigns, use of digital media by political actors, studies on marketing, journalism and politics, or research on civic deliberation, citizen participation and engagement.

The coding template used for the analysis was composed of the following variables, all of them drawing on similar previous studies (Bennett and Pfetsch, 2018; Chung *et al.*, 2013; Gallego, 2017; Graber and Smith, 2005; Hanusch and Vos, 2019; Karpf *et al.*, 2015; Keating and Totzkay, 2019; Lotero-Echeverri *et al.*, 2020; Nielsen, 2014 and 2017; Piñeiro-Naval, 2020; Piñeiro-Naval and Mangana, 2019; Rodríguez-Estrada *et al.*, 2017; Sierra and Rodríguez-Virgili, 2020):

1. The year in which the article was published: from 2013 to 2017.
2. Journal in which the manuscript was included.
3. SJR impact index of the journal in the year in which the article was published.
4. Number of authors that sign the manuscript.
5. University to which the signatories belong (the affiliation of the

- first author was collected in the event that several institutions were identified).
6. Type of work ($\alpha_k = 0.78$): empirical, theoretical essay or methodological.
 7. Object of study ($\alpha_k = 1$): sender, message, receiver or structure of the media system.
 8. Theory or conceptual corpus alluded to ($\alpha_k = 0.72$): see Table 2³ for further details.
 9. Used methodology ($\alpha_k = 0.73$): see Table 2.
 10. Analyzed media ($\alpha_k = 1$): see Table 2.
 11. Selected study sample ($\alpha_k = 0.81$): uses probabilistic or non-probabilistic criteria.
 12. Epistemological paradigm to which the manuscript adheres ($\alpha_k = 0.91$): positivist, cultural, critical or rhetorical.

The first five variables serve a general bibliometric characterization function, while the remaining seven items are analytical-operational. It should be noted that the data pertaining to the impact index of the journals were extracted as independent variables from the SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2018); factor that allowed their subsequent triangulation (Denzin, 2015) with the data collected here.

The collection of these was carried out during November and December 2018. A random subsample of $n = 18$ articles ($\sim 11\%$ of the sample) was coded by two evaluators to measure the reliability of the procedure. Krippendorff's Alpha (Hayes and Krippendorff, 2007; Krippendorff, 2011) was used to calculate this parameter, which reached a very satisfactory average value: $M(\alpha_k) = 0.85$ (the α_k of each analytical-operational variable is listed above).

Results

Starting with the bibliometric parameters, the number of articles that have been published each year amounts to: $M_{\text{annual}} = 33.4$ papers ($SD = 17.6$), while its average impact factor is: $M_{\text{SJR-IF}} = 0.432$ ($SD = 0.227$). Figure 1 verifies that both the annual increase in manuscripts (H_1) [$\lambda = 0.833$; $F(4; 163) = 8.17$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.167$] and especially the increase in their impact [$F_{\text{SJR-IF} \times \text{year}}(4; 162) = 28.17$; $p < 0.001$; $\eta^2 = 0.415$] are very prominent throughout the time period analyzed. In fact, both data correlate very strongly and significantly [$r(165) = 0.633$; $p < 0.001$]; therefore, the more it

³ Figures and tables can be found in the Appendix at the end of this article (Editor's note).

is published, the more impact it generates.

As for the journals, the sample is distributed as follows among the seven journals that served as data sampling units: *Comunicar* (1.2%), *El Profesional de la Información* (18%), *Communication & Society* (16.8%), *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* (27.5%), *Cuadernos.info* (13.2%), *Comunicación y Sociedad* (13.8%) y *Palabra Clave* (9.6%). In this sense, Spanish journals account for 63.5% of the total production, while Latin America and Spain journals are limited to 36.5%. When compared them regarding the average impact factor over the five-year period analyzed, we observed statistically significant differences between Spanish ($M_{\text{SJR-IF}} = 0.568$; $SD = 0.142$) and Latin America and Spain ($M_{\text{SJR-IF}} = 0.195$; $SD = 0.135$), and of “large” size [$t(165) = 16.63$; $p < 0.001$; $d = 2.69$] (Cohen, 1988; Johnson *et al.*, 2008).

Regarding the number of authors signing each manuscript, the descriptive values are: $M_{\text{authors}} = 2.17$ ($SD = 1.01$). In this sense, it is observed that the impact of the papers increases as the number of authors rises [$r(165) = 0.343$; $p < 0.001$]. The most prominent institutions of affiliation are the Universidad de Valladolid, Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Universidad de Valencia. Of the 78 organisms identified, the 13 listed in Table 1 account for 46.7% of the total production. On the other hand, all of them are Spanish with the exception of the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, both of which are Mexican.

From the analytical-operational point of view, 87.4% of the papers were empirical, 9% theoretical essay and 3.6% methodological (H_2). On the other hand, most of the studies focus on the message (74.9%); secondly, on the audience (10.8%); then on the structure (7.8%), and lastly on the source of the political information (6.6%). Table 2 summarizes the findings related to the used theories and methods, as well as the analyzed media. In this regard, framing theory (18.6%) is the dominant theoretical corpus in the research focused on political communication (H_3). Moreover, it should be noted that in 29.3% of the studies there is no specific conceptual scaffolding.

Regarding methods, content analysis is undoubtedly the predominant one (32.3%). If we group the methods into quantitative and qualitative (H_4), we observe that 59.3% of the papers use quantitative methods, while 28.1% use qualitative techniques (note that 12.6% of the manuscripts are not of an empirical nature). To conclude Table 2, despite social media and other elements of Web 2.0 are the leading media in the sample (33.5%) (H_5), traditional media (52.7%) are still receiving more attention from researchers

than new media (40.7%).

To conclude the univariate percentage review of the analytical-operational items, it should be clarified that 65.9% of the articles use non-probabilistic samples; however, 21.6% are based on statistical rules for the design of probability samples (remember, once again, that the other 12.7% are non-empirical works). Regarding epistemological paradigms, the distribution of articles is as follows: positivist (60.5%), critical (18.6%), cultural (12.6%) and rhetorical (8.4%).

Proceeding now to comparison between Spanish and Latin America and Spain journals (RQ1) (see Table 3), and regarding the types of papers (empirical, theoretical essay or methodological), there are no differences between the journals [$\chi^2 (2, N = 167) = 2.47; p = 0.291; v = 0.122$]. They are produced in relation to the objects of study [$\chi^2 (3, N = 167) = 8.84; p = 0.031; v = 0.23$], since the papers published in Spanish journals focus more on the message, while the Latin America and Spain ones allude to the sender and the receiver. The epistemological paradigms also show divergences [$\chi^2 (3, N = 167) = 9.32; p = 0.025; v = 0.236$], as the positivist one is more commonly used in Spain and the critical one in Latin America and Spain. In this line, quantitative methods are more typical of the former and qualitative techniques of the latter [$\chi^2 (1, N = 146) = 7.21; p = 0.007; v = 0.222$]. Differences are also observed in the media [$\chi^2 (1, N = 156) = 4.92; p = 0.026; v = 0.178$]; in this case, those considered as “new media” are more prominent in manuscripts published in Spanish journals, while traditional media in Latin America and Spain.

On the other hand, taking the impact factor as starting point it is of great interest to contrast whether there are differences depending on the methods used in the articles and their protagonist media. According to the data shown in Figure 2, it can be seen that manuscripts using quantitative methods ($M = 0.472; SD = 0.209$) have a greater impact factor than those using qualitative techniques ($M = 0.356; SD = 0.241$), and significantly so [$t(144) = 2.97; p = 0.003; d = 0.514$], with a “medium” effect size (Cohen, 1988; Johnson *et al.*, 2008). A very similar situation is established between the works focused on the study of traditional media ($M = 0.377; SD = 0.238$) compared to new media ($M = 0.517; SD = 0.189$), since there are clear differences between the two [$t(154) = -3.98; p < 0.001; d = -0.651$].

Finally, Two-step cluster analysis, a previously employed strategy (Piñeiro-Naval and Morais, 2019), was implemented. This procedure, valid for both continuous and categorical variables (Rundle-Thiele *et al.*,

2015), operated with the six most notable items: the theory used in the manuscripts,⁴ the method, the object of study, the media on which they focus, the subject referred to and the paradigm to which the studies in the sample are adhered. The silhouette measure of cohesion and separation amounted to “0.3”, which is a quite acceptable value (Norušis, 2012). Regarding the weight of the predictor items, the method is the most important element (with a value of 1), followed by the epistemological paradigm (0.58), the media (0.53), the theory (0.29), the object of study (0.27) and lastly the type of work (0.04). The four clusters derived from the analysis have a size coefficient (from the largest to the smallest) of “1.64”, which indicates the homogeneity of the groups (Tkaczynski, 2017). Briefly, each of these four publication patterns (all of an empirical nature) is characterized as follows (see Table 4 for further detail):

- 1st: articles using content analysis to study the messages disseminated in social media, and whose theoretical basis lies in the concepts of Web 2.0.
- 2nd: studies by critical analysis of the discourse of the frames reported in the press.
- 3rd: works also on press and framing, studied with the content analysis technique.
- 4th: manuscripts that by means of a methodological triangulation address aspects related to the agenda-setting of the media in general, and that are focused on the receivers.

These four clusters (RQ2) can be compared according to their impact factor. Thus, the analysis of variance shows that there are differences between the groups [$F_{\text{Clusters} \times \text{SJRI-IF}}(3; 114) = 8.25; p < 0,001; \eta^2 = 0.178$]. In a comparative way, and according to Dunnett’s post-hoc T3 test, the 1st and 2nd clusters show the greatest differences $t(66) = 5.101; p < 0,001; d = 1.232$], characterized by a large effect size (Cohen, 1988; Johnson *et al.*, 2008).

Finally, these four patterns were cross-referenced with the journals in which the articles are published. According to the values shown in Table 5, significant differences were observed [$\chi^2(3, N = 118) = 19.42; p < 0,001; v = 0.406$]. On the basis of the adjusted standardized residuals, Latin America and Spain journals tend to include the 2nd and 4th types of articles

4 The variable “theory” has been recoded to take into account only those papers that have used some kind of conceptual corpus, considering the rest as missing. For this reason, the total number of units considered for the two-step cluster analysis amounts to $n = 118$ (70.7% of the total).

to a large extent, while Spanish journals favor the 1st case. As for the 3rd one, there are no differences between journals.

Discussion and conclusions

We started this research with a purpose: to examine the publication of articles on politics in the main Hispanic communication journals during the period 2013-2017. After the data collection and their analysis, from a bibliometric point of view we conclude that there has been a notable increase in both the number of manuscripts and their impact, which indicates the growing relevance of this field of study in the framework of the social sciences. On the other hand, the percentages also show that it is the Spanish journals, in comparison with the Latin America and Spain ones, that publish a higher number of articles in relation to the subject matter in question. The current events in Spain as the emergence of new formations, the awakening of civic action movements, the multiple elections held and the problems caused by the independence of Catalonia have marked the political instability and are factors that possibly justify the differences between some journals and others.

Looking at the results related to the authorship of the papers, we can conclude that manuscripts on communication and politics tend to be collaborative, with an average of more than two authors, what increases as the impact factor goes up. It also indicates that researchers at Spanish universities are more proactive than their Latin America and Spain counterparts, where only the Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León and the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, both Mexican institutions, stand out.

At the analytical-operational level, empirical studies are given greater prominence over the theoretical-analytical or methodological studies. This tendency towards the empirical results in the observation of a recurring object of study: the message, which overshadows the senders and audiences. As we observed in the state of the art, there are several experts who demand a broader variety of approaches to address the multiple facets of an ever-changing political system. This critical view may be applied to the corpus collected here, especially if we consider that the theoretical precepts with the greatest presence are still framing and agenda-setting, and that the most widely used methodology for the study of political information is still content analysis, a resource that can hardly address the study of representative samples. This would confirm, as some authors have noted (Bennett and Iyengar, 2008; Bimber, 2015; Kparf *et al.*, 2015; Nielsen,

2014; Robinson, 2019), a sort of “paradigmatic consensus” in the research on the relationship between communication and politics, in such a way that the positivist paradigm would prevail over the others. Finally, in line with international trends that analyze the multiple connections between new media and political issues, it is found that social media are the preferred media of scholars in the area.

In addition to a general presentation of this cross-border academic production, it is important to highlight the differences between Spanish and Latin America and Spain journals. In this sense, the articles in the main Spanish journals adhere to the positivist paradigm, and usually include empirical works focused on the quantitative study of the messages disseminated through the new media. In contrast, their Latin America and Spain counterparts usually present manuscripts base on the critical paradigm, consisting of studies focused on the qualitative analysis of both senders and receivers of traditional media.

From the publication patterns perspective (here defined as “clusters” because of their statistical meaning), it is possible to identify a recurrent pattern of articles for each geographic origin. In Spain, the authors regularly practice content analysis (therefore, an empirical and positivist method) of the political messages disseminated over social media, based on the precepts of social Web or 2.0 at the theoretical level. In Latin America and Spain, however, political communication scholars usually focus on the critical analysis of the frames of the information reported in the traditional press. These two models do not only present major differences in terms of theory and methodology, but also in bibliometric terms, that is, manuscripts from Spanish journals have a higher impact than those published in Latin America and Spain.

On the other hand, the relevance of the present study lies in the fact that it has allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of this fertile area of research. As stated Alves *et al.* (2019: 38), “when political context turns into the object of significant transformations, new sets of theories and methodological approaches become necessary to account for the new reality”. However, we have found that political communication research in the Hispanic sphere needs to delve deeper into the implementation of innovative tools that allow explaining new concepts. This must be balanced so that certain problems that are found in the Anglo-Saxon environment do not emerge. As explained by Kosicki *et al.* (2011: 557-558):

Despite the tremendous growth in methodological techniques and data analysis

procedures, researchers still face many difficulties. In their eagerness to apply cutting-edge analytical techniques and procedures, some researchers show a tendency to hide behind method in order to raise methodological sophistication over the theory.

Therefore, the progressive refinement of methods should not be detrimental to the ultimate purpose for which they were designed: to solve theoretical problems that allow the discipline advance.

It is necessary to recognize a number of issues regarding the limitations of the study, which should be addressed for future works. The first concerns the sample, since it is highly likely that part of the production generated by authors based in Spain and Latin America and Spain has been disseminated in journals outside these geographical contexts. Likewise, other journals in political science or the arts and humanities fields tend to be used as vehicles for the dissemination of political communication research. On the other hand, in order to obtain more precise data on the impact of the article, it would be highly recommended to take the number of direct citations received for each manuscript, which would allow both the trend and comparative analyses to be refined. Thus, considering these aspects, our subsequent meta-research will have a greater descriptive and explanatory capacity.

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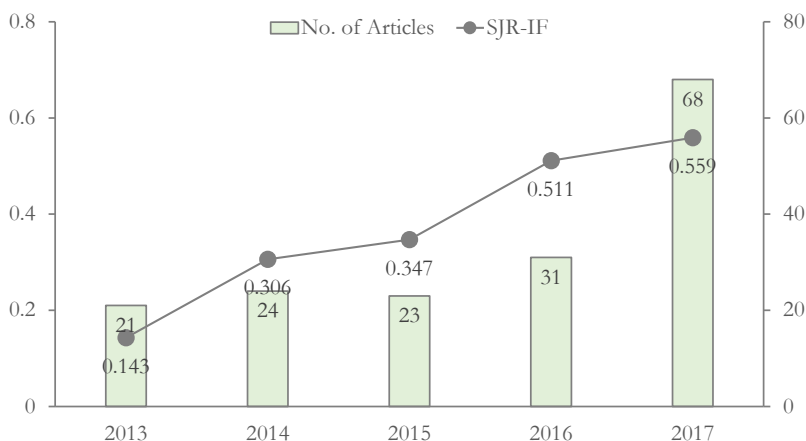
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Appendix

Figure 1

Average annual evolution of articles and their impact factor SJR



Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study and the impact factor (secondary data) taken from SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2018).

Table 1

Most prominent universities of authors' affiliation

University	No. of articles
University of Valladolid	12
Complutense University of Madrid	9
University of Valencia	9
University of Málaga	6
University of Santiago de Compostela	6
Rey Juan Carlos University	6
Autonomous University of Nuevo León	5
University of the Basque Country	5
Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla	4
Autonomous University of Barcelona	4
University Carlos III of Madrid	4
University of Vigo	4
Pompeu Fabra University	4
Total	78

Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study.

Table 2

Theories or concepts, methods and media

Theories/ concepts	%	Methods	%	Media	%
Framing	18.6	Content analysis	32.3	Social media, Web 2.0	33.5
Agenda-setting	12	Discourse analysis	13.8	Press	23.4
Web 2.0	10.2	Case study	11.4	Media in general	14.3
Engagement	7.8	Triangulation	8.3	Television	9.6
Info/Politainment	4.8	Survey	7.2	Internet, ICT	6.6
Narrative-film theories	3.6	Automatic content analysis	4.8	Advertisement	3.6
Selective exposure	2.4	Bibliometric analysis	3	Cinema	3
Social identity theories	1.8	Network analysis	3	Receivers	2.4
Transmedia	1.8	Interviews	1.8	Journals	1.8
Cultural studies	1.2	Ethnographic study	1.2	Scientific articles	0.6
Others ⁵	6.5	Heuristic analysis	0.6	Radio	0.6
No specific theoretical framework is used	29.3	Not empirical work	12.6	Videogames	0.6
Total	100	Total	100	Total	100

Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study.

⁵ Other theories and concepts detected were: uses and gratifications theory, models of narrative persuasion, media literacy, web design precepts (information architecture, usability, accessibility, etc.), corporate social responsibility and branding.

Table 3

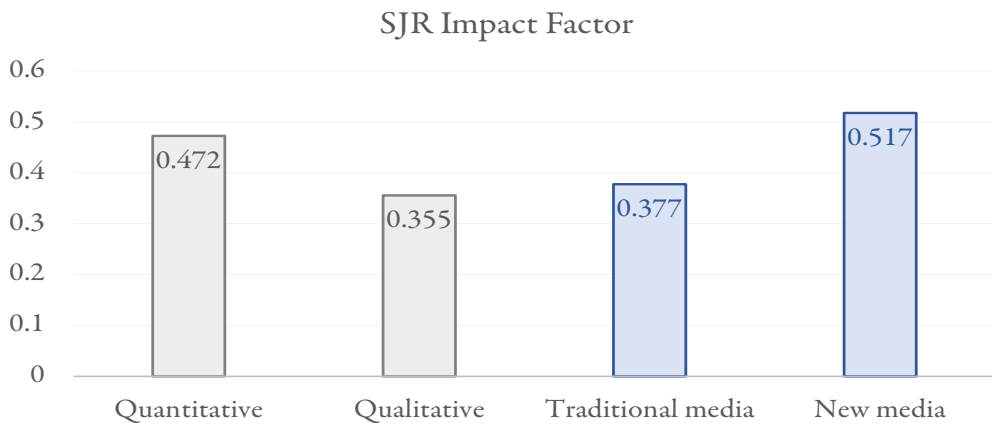
Multiple comparisons based on the origin of the journals

Parameters of analysis	% Total	Origin of the journals	
		Spain	Latin America and Spain
• Type of work:			
Empirical	87.4	88.7	85.2
Theoretical-analytical	9	9.4	8.2
Methodological	3.6	1.9	6.6
• Object of study:			
Sender	6.6	3.8–	11.5+
Message	74.9	82.1+	62.3–
Receiver	10.8	7.5–	16.4+
Structure	7.8	6.6	9.8
• Epistemological paradigms:			
Positivist	60.5	68.9+	45.9–
Cultural	12.6	11.3	14.8
Critical	18.6	13.2–	27.9+
Rhetorical	8.4	6.6	11.5
N	167	106	61
• Research methods:			
Quantitative	67.8	75.5+	53.8–
Qualitative	32.2	24.5–	46.2+
N	146	94	52
• Leading media			
Traditional	56.4	50–	68.5+
New	43.6	50+	31.5–
N	156	102	54
– Value statistically lower (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).			
+ Value statistically higher (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).			

Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study.

Figure 2

Comparisons according to the SJR impact factor of the methods and media



Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study and the impact factor (secondary data) taken from SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2018).

Table 4
 Characterization of clusters

No. cluster	Size		Centers of predictors (%)					Impact Factor	
	n	%	Method	Paradigm	Media	Theory	Object	Type	M _{SJR} SD
1 st	36	30.5%	Content analysis (55.6)	Positivist (100)	Social media (86.1)	Web 2.0 concepts (44.4)	Message (94.4)	Empirical (100)	0.569 0.157
2 nd	32	27.1%	Discourse analysis (50)	Critical (50)	Press (21.9)	Framing (28.1)	Message (81.2)	Empirical (90.6)	0.327 0.229
3 rd	28	23.7%	Content analysis (89.3)	Positivist (100)	Press (75)	Framing (46.4)	Message (100)	Empirical (100)	0.418 0.206
4 th	22	18.6%	Triangulation (45.5)	Positivist (86.4)	Media in general (45.5)	Agenda-setting (31.8)	Audience (50)	Empirical (100)	0.422 0.225
Total	118	100							0.441 0.221

Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study and the impact factor (secondary data) taken from SCImago Journal & Country Rank (2018).

Table 5

Clusters according to journals (% column)

No. cluster	%	Origin of the journals	
		Spain	Latin America and Spain
Cluster 1 st	30.5%	42.1+	9.5–
Cluster 2 nd	27.1%	18.4–	42.9+
Cluster 3 rd	23.7%	26.3	19
Cluster 4 th	18.6%	13.2–	28.6+
N	118	76	42

– Value statistically lower (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

+ Value statistically higher (analysis of adjusted standardized residuals).

Source: Own elaboration based on the primary data of the study.

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