COMMUNICATION & SOCIETY

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Research on News Sharing.
A Proposal of bibliometric analysis

Abstract

This study seeks to establish whether news sharing in social media is a mature field of research by using bibliometrics as a tool. The Web of Science database was searched for articles that contained the term 'news sharing' in titles, keywords, and abstracts. A total of 133 articles was obtained, which enabled us to address the question of whether there are well-established journals and authors that cover the subject. The results show a certain ambiguity, which could explain why the chosen subject matter is often studied in fields outside of Communication Studies; however, while studies on news sharing are conducted by researchers from heterogeneous fields, this has not translated into greater interdisciplinarity.

Keywords
News sharing, social media, bibliometric analyses, Web of Science, co-citation.

1. Introduction

The various uses of bibliometric analyses include exploring areas of knowledge, detecting trends, narrowing down the wide range of approaches to specific topics, and identifying co-authorship networks. In other words, recognising sets of researchers who frequently collaborate with each other and reflect the existence of research communities or possible academic genealogies with their own particularities (Segado–Boj *et al*., 2021, p. 81).

Since López Piñero began to use bibliometrics for the assessment of scientific output and all phenomena linked to science communication in the early 1970s, this methodological technique has become an essential tool for furthering the development of research in various fields in Spain. Its wide use has made Spain one of the most productive countries in in terms of the number of bibliometric theses and articles (Delgado López–Cózar *et al*., 2006; Díaz–Campo, 2016). This has also been the case for research in areas as dissimilar as environmental journalism (Barrenquero & Marín, 2014), transmedia narrative (Vicente-Torrico, 2017), organisational communication (Míguez-González & Costa-Sánchez, 2019), the rise of electronic sports (Carrillo *et al*., 2018), and even political advertising (Arango Espinal *et al*., 2020). Some areas can be considered as fertile as they are timeless for these kinds of studies; however, there are others where such a proliferation seems ephemeral or lacking continuity, in an attempt to extend the longevity of a trend. This is the case of research on media consumption (Repiso *et al*., 2011), and more specifically, on news sharing on social media (Segado–Boj *et al*. 2019).

While this area of research has become increasingly appealing to the scientific community, it is true that it has rarely produced bibliometric analyses as rigorous as those undertaken regarding the connection between television and social media (Segado-Boj *et al.*, 2015).

The problem with the line of research described above is that its limits have been blurring recently due to the exponential increase in academic attention it has received. This has led to the need for new longitudinal descriptive studies to delve into the origin of the trend, its characteristics, and its potential avenues for growth. Additionally, this research should seek to ascertain to what extent the vast plethora of publications linked to social media reflects a mature and well-established field in Spain.

From a bibliometric perspective, Alicia Moreno-Delgado (2021) is one of the authors who has addressed why this type of topic has not only been tackled within Communication, Film, Radio and Television studies, but also by researchers related to Education, Economics, Sociology and the Humanities, among other disciplines. In other words, there is considerable diversity and imprecision, with the advantages and risks that this entails. Therefore, the question arises as to whether this is also the case in a field that is much more constrained than that of general media consumption, namely, the area of study that deals with news sharing on social media, over and above what is involved in the mere "incidental news consumption" (Mitchelstein & Boczkowski, 2018).

1.1. *An approach to the concept of 'news sharing'*

As early as in 2015, Anna Sophie Kümpel, Veronika Karnowski and Till Keyling wondered about the importance of focusing academic interest on the field of "news sharing" (2015), since some platforms (Twitter, Facebook) were becoming a basic constituent part of online news distribution and consumption. Noguera-Vivo (2018) would answer this question three years later. He stressed that information sharing is "the essence of social media", to the extent that it is really difficult to understand why audience research in journalism often ignores this process. In his view, extending the notion of participation to a broader perspective related to the processes of information exchange should no longer be postponed in the social sciences, and should go beyond the appeal that this might have from a pure marketing standpoint (Nelson-Field, 2013). Establishing how and why people share one type of information instead of another, and how these processes are redefining the role of the media on a daily basis makes this a topical issue.

By talking about 'news sharing' we are not only taking a theoretical approach to a concept that was once barely visible, but also highlighting the need to add value to the news based on the interest of social media users. This relatively new perspective has permeated the contributions made by Trilling, Tolochko and Burscher (2016), García-Perdomo, Salaverría, Kilgo and Harlow (2018), Hermida (2014) or Kalsnes and Larsson (2018), among other international authors, who have not lost sight of the importance of attending to the development of the relationship between journalist and audience (Lewis, 2012). In this way, sharing information is perceived as a daily action by millions of citizens who connect to the Internet as part of their daily consumption ritual. In many cases, they think about the content in a deeper way when they retweet it or comment on it on Facebook and Instagram (Noguera-Vivo, 2018, p. 150).

1.2. *Research questions*

Spain was a late entry into the international publication circuit of scientific research results in Communication Studies when compared to the rest of Europe, the United States, and some Latin American countries. However, this has not prevented there from being an exponential growth (Saperas, 2016) that has often translated into positivist studies about audiences and their interaction with ICT and social media (Segado-Boj *et al.*, 2022). Assuming that social

media have fed a field of study of their own for many years (not only seen from the point of view of content production), a need has been identified to contribute to these in-depth bibliometric analyses.

In the scenario described above, this article aims to provide answers to four major questions made up of a number of issues, taking as a reference the queries posed by Segado-Boj, Martín-Quevedo and Fernández-Gómez (2021) in their bibliometric paper about television series.

Q1. Is news sharing in social media a truly mature field of research? Are there consistent and specialised journals and authors? Are the most productive researchers also the most cited? Is there a constant annual growth in the number of articles published?

Q2. What are the conceptual trends and lines of research in the field of 'news sharing' (Lee & Ma, 2012; Kümpel *et al.*, 2015; Kalsnes & Larsson, 2018; Apuke & Omar, 2021)?

Q3. Is it possible to speak of theoretical foundations and reference groups that tend to be cited together?

These questions are addressed in detail in the methodology section below.

2. Methodology

Bibliometrics is a proven and useful tool for transforming complex information about a discipline into data that can be understood through mathematical methods. It makes it possible to define, for example, the research profile of a given academic institution on a given topic (Moya-Anegón *et al.*, 2007) that involves applying mathematical operations and extrapolating statistical methods to books and other platforms or media for the communication or dissemination of knowledge (Pritchard, 1969).

Following Okubo's (1997) ideal of delving into the status of science through the global production of highly-specialised scientific literature, the analysis described here focuses on the studies on news dissemination in social media available in the Web of Science (n = 133 articles). More specifically, the fieldwork looked at authorship, journals, national production and international collaboration, co-citation of keywords pointing to the main intellectual trends in the field, and co-occurrence of references to determine whether there is a theoretical body of contributions that serve as a basis for research.

The Core Collection of the Web of Science database was used to obtain bibliographic information. The term 'news sharing' was searched in the titles, keywords*,* and abstracts of documents, without considering deviations in nomenclature. No complementary searches of the term were conducted due to the restrictive nature of the concept; academically, 'news sharing' is the most common way of referring to the phenomenon that aims to understand the people who circulate news in this new media landscape (Noguera-Vivo, 2018). In view of the subject matter of the publications reviewed, it can be stated that the presence of articles from outside the sphere of Communication Studies (or from Social Sciences themselves) was negligible. In the fieldwork for this study, the search was restricted to articles published in journals, resulting in a universe of 133 units that were directly related to the topic.

The bibliometric data were downloaded on 7 January 2022, and the descriptive productivity and performance data were obtained using the VosViewer software (van Eck & Waltman, 2010). The same software was used to generate the co-citation and co-word networks. These, in turn, were analysed and represented by use of the Pajek software (Batagelj & Mrvar, 1998). The content of the articles was not included in the object of study of this research.

Representativeness was the criterion used to view the networks. In this way, the most prominent graphs from the fieldwork included only the 20 most important references and the 50 most important keywords in terms of the degree of centrality in the respective communities. In each of these figures, the size of the nodes describes their degree of centrality

and the thickness of the lines. Priority was given to the frequency of co-occurrences, so the more times two references or keywords appear together, the thicker the connecting line is.

Finally, the colour of the nodes corresponds to the different communities identified by the Louvain algorithm, with the following parameters: multi-level coarsening, single refinement, resolution parameter = 1, number of random restarts = 1, maximum number of levels in each iteration = 20 and maximum number of repetitions at each level = 50.

The method described above was applied and yielded results that allowed the research questions set out above to be answered.

3. Results

3.1. *Data collection*

Research on news sharing on social media has increased exponentially since 2019, with a near-steady growth rate since 2013. Within this upward trend, 76 articles were published in relation to this 'young' area of study in the last two years taken as a reference in this paper (Table 1 and Graph 1).

Table 1: Articles published by year and percentage of growth.

Year	Number of published articles	Growth compared to previous year
2005	1	-
2011	1	0%
2012	1	0%
2013	2	100%
2014	3	50%
2015	8	167%
2016	6	-25%
2017	6	0%
2018	14	133%
2019	15	7%
2020	29	93%
2021	47	62%

Source: Own elaboration.

Graph 1: Number of articles about 'news sharing' published by year.
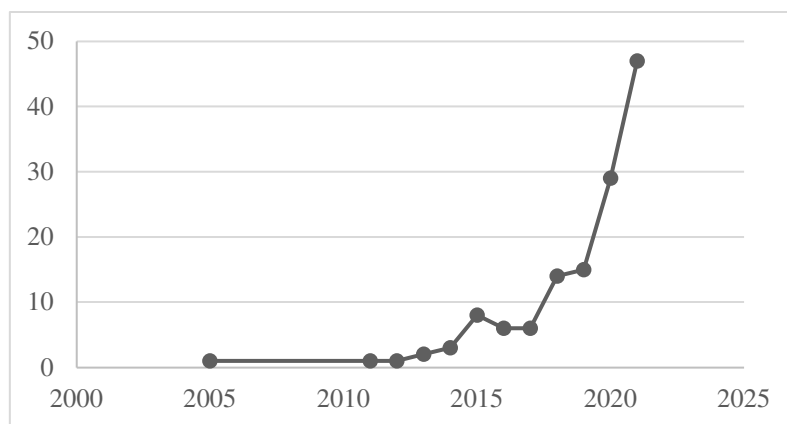
Source: Own elaboration.

It goes without saying that the sharing of news on social media is not a recurrent line of research for most authors, as can be concluded from the data that follows. Whereas the 133 studies in the sample were written by a total of 310 authors, only 280 of them have published research on this subject and only 28 were listed as single authors. Each study therefore has an average of 2.32 authors, and each researcher produced an average of 0.43 publications within the observed field.

Moreover, only 7 of the 310 authors had three or more publications related to news sharing (Table 2), and only one of them (Ling) had 5 articles in this area. Two researchers (Duffy and Lee) authored four articles and the rest of this select list (Choi, Larsson, Segado–Boj andTrilling) published three articles.

Table 2: Most productive authors.

Authors	Number of published articles
Ling, R.	5
Duffy, A.	4
Lee, J. K.	4
Choi, J.	3
Larsson, A. O.	3
Segado-Boj, F.	3
Trilling, D.	3

Source: Own elaboration.

Among the most cited manuscripts, 14 of the total sample accumulated more than 50 citations, while the most cited article in absolute terms (540 citations) was related to news sharing on social media, as well as motivation, reader gratification and user experience. However, this article dates back to 2012, and therefore it is not very representative, as it is (almost) the only article that covered this topic from the beginning of the period analysed until nearly 2015 (Table 3).

Table 3: Most frequently cited manuscripts.

Order	Author(s)	Journal	Title	Year	Citations	Avrg. nº of citations/year	Keywords
1	Lee, CS; Ma, L	*Computers in Human Behavior*	*News sharing in social media: The effect of gratifications and prior experience*	2012	540	54	Social media, News sharing, Gratifications, Motivations, Experience, Social media
2	Oeldorf-Hirsch, A; Sundar, SS	*Computers in Human Behavior*	*Posting, commenting, and tagging: Effects of sharing news stories on Facebook*	2015	142	20	Content sharing, News sharing, Social media, Facebook, Broadcast level, Self as source
3	Trilling, D; Tolochko, P; Burscher, B	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	*From Newsworthiness to Shareworthiness: How to Predict News Sharing Based on Article Characteristics*	2017	131	26	News Dissemination, News Sharing, News Values, Social Network Sites, Online News
4	Talwar, S; Dhir, A; Kaur, P; Zafar, N; Alrasheedy, M	*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*	*Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior*	2019	92	31	Cross-sectional study, Fear of missing out (FoMO), Self-disclosure, Social comparison, Social media fatigue and trust

5	Apuke, OD; Omar, B	*Telematics and Informatics*	*Fake news and COVID-19: modelling the predictors of fake news sharing among social media users*	2021	82	82	COVID-19, Fake news, Fake news sharing, Nigeria, Social media users
6	Bright, J	*Journal of Communication*	*The Social News Gap: How News Reading and News Sharing Diverge*	2016	74	12	Social Media, News, News Sharing, News Gap, Social Networks
7	Park, HW; Park, S; Chong, M	*Journal of Medical Internet Research*	*Conversations and Medical News Frames on Twitter: Infodemiological Study on COVID-19 in South Korea*	2020	71	36	Infodemiology, COVID-19, SARS-CoV-2, coronavirus, Twitter, South Korea, medical news, social media, pandemic, outbreak, infectious disease, public health
8	Kim, HS	*Journal of Communication*	*Attracting Views and Going Viral: How Message Features and News-Sharing Channels Affect Health News Diffusion*	2015	70	10	Selective Exposure, Virality, Selection, Retransmission, Diffusion, Message Effects, Social Media, Big Data, Computational Social Science
9	Chadwick, A; Vaccari, C; O'Loughlin, B	*New Media & Society*	*Do tabloids poison the well of social media? Explaining democratically dysfunctional news sharing*	2018	68	17	Disinformation, 'fake news', misinformation, news, news sharing, social media, tabloid news
10	Ma, L; Lee, CS; Goh, DHL	*Online Information Review*	*Understanding news sharing in social media An explanation from the diffusion of innovations theory*	2014	67	8	Social Media, Structural Equation Modelling, Diffusion of Innovation Theory, News sharing
11	Valenzuela, S; Pina, M; Ramirez, J	*Journal of Communication*	*Behavioral Effects of Framing on Social Media Users: How Conflict, Economic, Human Interest, and Morality Frames Drive News Sharing*	2017	62	12	Framing, News sharing, Social media, Mixed methods, Facebook, Twitter
12	Bobkowski, PS	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	*Sharing the News: Effects of Informational Utility and Opinion Leadership on Online News Sharing*	2015	59	8	Electronic word-of-mouth, Informational utility, News sharing, Online news, Opinion leadership, Participatory journalism, Social media
13	Kalsnes, B; Larsson, AO	*Journalism Studies*	*Understanding News Sharing Across Social Media: Detailing distribution on Facebook and Twitter*	2018	54	14	Facebook, News, News sharing, Norway, Social Media, Twitter
14	Choi, J; Lee, JK	*Computers in Human Behavior*	*Investigating the effects of news sharing and political interest on social media network heterogeneity*	2015	53	8	Social networking services (SNSs), News sharing, Network heterogeneity, Political interest,

Source: Own elaboration.

There was relatively little overlap between the most productive authors and the most cited articles, as only Lee (with 4 articles) and Choi (with 3) were included in the table of studies with more than 50 citations with co-signed publications (in 14th place). Trilling (author of 3 works on news sharing in social media) co-authored a paper with Tolochko and Burscher that ranked as the third most cited article, with 131 mentions.

There was a notable quantitative difference between the most cited article (540 citations) and the following one (142). The first (authored by Lee & Ma in 2012) contained a study that offered a glimpse at an initial interest in what influences people's willingness to engage in

news sharing (or otherwise). The researchers argued that news sharing on social media has become a phenomenon of growing social, economic, and political importance over the last decade, as anyone can now participate in the production and dissemination of news in global virtual communities. In this regard, Lee and Ma's study reported the results of a survey of 203 students which showed that young people, motivated by the gratifications of information seeking, socialising and status feeding, are more likely to share news on different platforms. In other words, this was a quantitative study in which an attempt was made to reflect a relatively recent phenomenon by using various communication theories.

The second most cited article (by Chadwick, Vaccari & O'Loughlin, 2018) researched user engagement with news content. More specifically, it claimed that, depending on the social opportunities available, asking for opinions on social media and following specific accounts led to experiencing greater involvement in dissemination and made the subject experience the feeling of having greater influence. In contrast, in the third most cited article (by Trilling, Tolochko & Burscher, 2017), the authors focussed more on the characteristics of 'shareworthiness' (i.e., the ability to share news items with the potential to have a positive impact on engagement). They also try to ascertain how to predict the number of times an article would be shared.

Articles that discussed news sharing on social media were predominantly published in Communication Studies journals. Not surprisingly, of the ten journals with the highest number of articles, all except *Computers in Human Behavior* belonged to the Communication sphere (Table 4). It is worth noting that among the ten journals with the highest number of publications, the dominant journal published 15 articles on the line of research examined here, while the last ones in the ranking published only four.

Table 4: Top 10 journals that published the highest number of articles on news sharing on social media.

Order	Journal	Articles	Subject areas
1	*Digital Journalism*	15	Communication
2	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	7	Communication
3	*Social Media + Society*	7	Communication, Cultural Studies
4	*New Media & Society*	5	Communication, Sociology and Political Science
5	*Computers in Human Behavior*	5	Psychology
6	*Information Communication & Society*	4	Communication, Library Science, and Information Science
7	*Journalism Studies*	4	Communication
8	*Journal of Communication*	4	Communication, Linguistics and Languages
9	*International Journal of Communication*	4	Communication
10	*Journalism Practice*	4	Communication

Source: Own elaboration.

The research also found that studies related to the phenomenon of news sharing are an emerging and, consequently, recent trend. This means that when one analyses the chronology of articles *published* in the three journals that have published the most articles on news sharing on social media (Figure 2), it can be seen that most of them are concentrated in the last few years:

Graph 2: Chronology of the publications of the three journals with the highest number of articles on 'news sharing'.
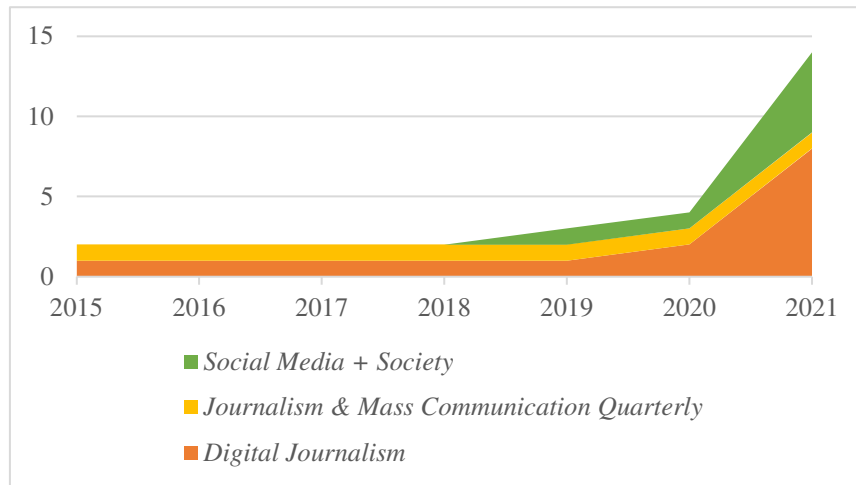
Source: Own elaboration.

3.2. *Conceptual and intellectual trends in the field*

The most frequently used keywords tended to be of two types (Table 5), although those that referred to the object of study in a general way, without over-specifying and using terms such as: *news sharing*, *social media*, *online news* and *news* stood out above the others. These keywords place the research within a line belonging to the field of Communication Studies; therefore, if they are used correctly, the possibilities of thematic dispersion are considerably reduced.

The second type of keywords that were most used could specify the type of research carried out within the study of news sharing on social media. Specifically, researchers used terms such as *fake news, Facebook, Twitter, misinformation, covid-19, fake news sharing* and *trust*.

**Table 5**: Most frequently used keywords.

Order	Keywords:	Articles
1	news sharing	62
2	social media	61
3	fake news	21
4	Facebook	20
5	Twitter	14
6	online news	10
7	news	9
8	misinformation	8
9	covid-19	7
10	fake news sharing/ trust	5

Source: Own elaboration.

The co-occurrence of keywords (Graph 1) shows the concepts that tended to appear together in an article. Three clearly defined clusters of terms could be observed.

Figure 1: Co-occurrence of keywords.
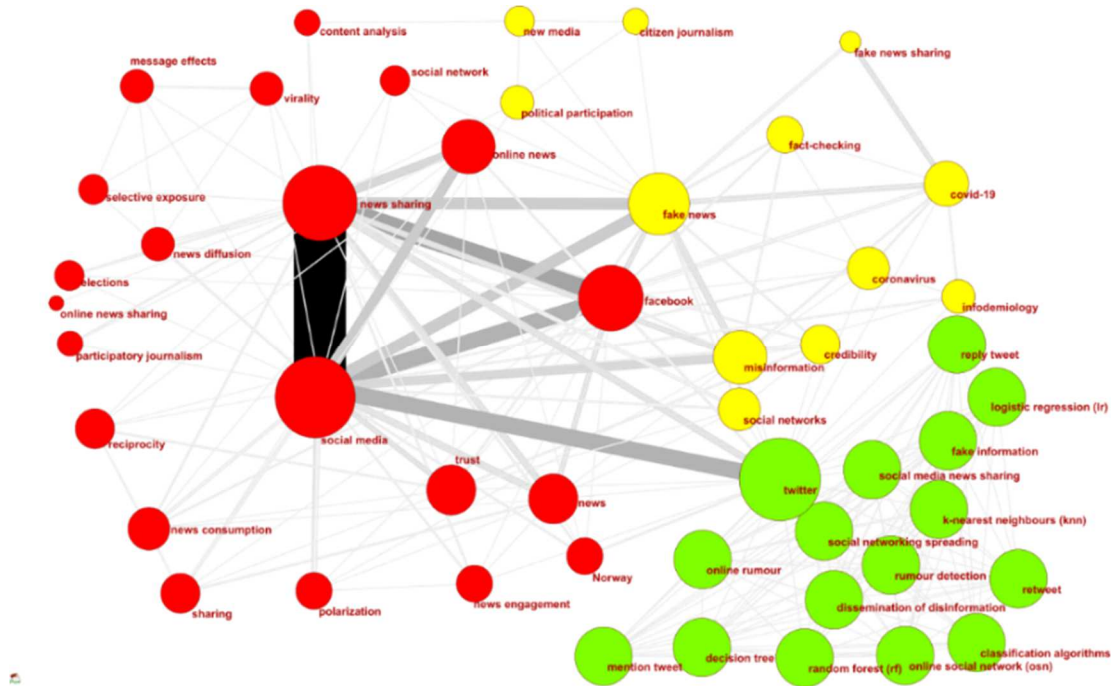
Source: Own elaboration.

The first cluster represented in red was generated around the terms 'news sharing' and 'social media'. Related terms such as 'online news', 'trust', 'news' and 'Facebook' appeared next to these keywords. The use of the term 'Facebook' is particularly interesting, as the fact that the name belongs to the cluster denotes an analysis of Facebook as a news distribution platform rather than as a social media platform *per se*. Similarly, the second cluster (represented in green) contains terms linked to 'Twitter', which is the main node. Lesser important terms are 'reply', 'tweet' and 'retweet', which belong to the same microblogging universe.

The third grouping, represented in yellow, is configured around the keyword 'fake news' and has a smaller composition than the rest in terms regarding the variety of terms used. Its relation to the concept of 'misinformation', 'covid-19' or 'fact-checking', among other keywords, is particularly remarkable.

3.3. *Co-citation analysis*

The co-citation analysis showed two different clusters represented in Graph 2 in two different colours (yellow and green), as well as in Table 6.

The first grouping (in yellow) is mostly composed of papers published in non-Communication Studies journals, in contrast to the second grouping (in green). This co-citation behaviour showed a possible lack of interdisciplinarity within the field under study.

Figure 2: Co-citation network.
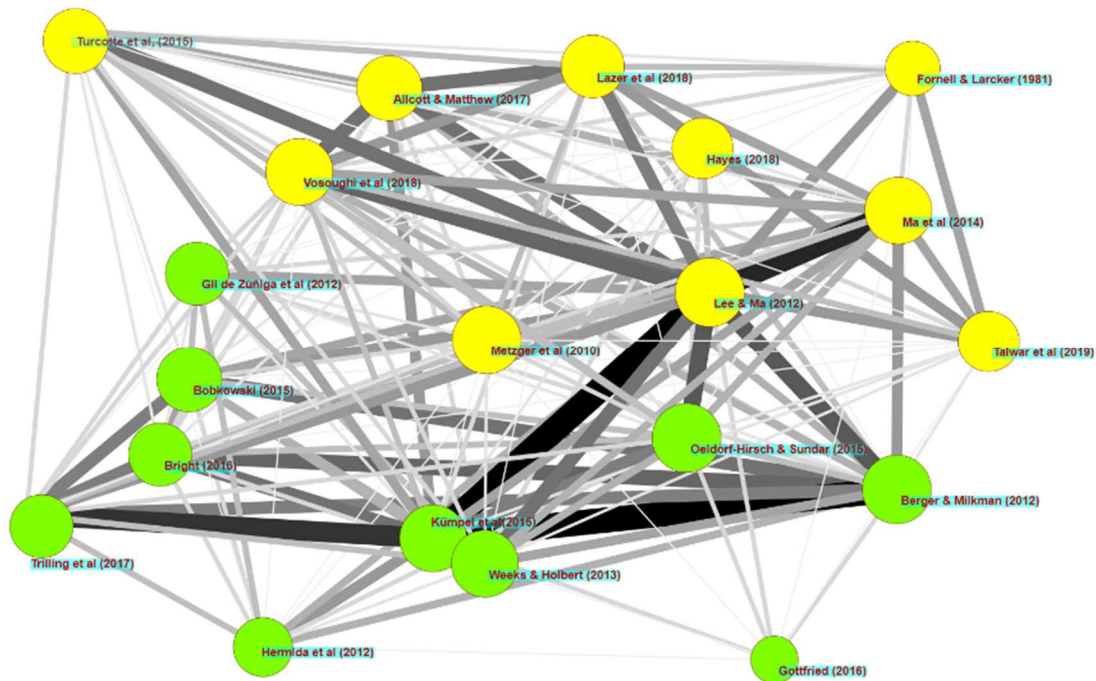
Source: Own elaboration.

Table 6: Works that tended to be co-cited.

Author	Article	Journal	Year
First cluster (yellow)			
Allcott, H.; Matthew, G.	*Social Media and Fake News in the 2016 Election*	*Journal of Economic Perspectives*	2017
Fornell, C.; Larcker, D. F.	*Evaluating Structural Equation Models with Unobservable Variables and Measurement Error*	*Journal of Marketing Research*	1981
Hayes, A. F.	*Introduction to Mediation, Moderation, and Conditional Process Analysis*	(Book)	2018
Lazer, D. *et al.*	*The science of fake news*	*Science*	2018
Lee, C. S.; Ma, L.	*News sharing in social media: The effect of gratifications and prior experience*	*Computers in Human Behavior*	2012
Ma, L.; Sian Lee, C.; Hoe-Lian Goh, D.	*Understanding news sharing in social media: An explanation from the diffusion of innovations theory*	*Online Information Review*	2014
Metzger, M. J.; Flanagin, A. J.; Medders, R. B.	*Social and Heuristic Approaches to Credibility Evaluation Online*	*Journal of Communication*	2010
Talwar, S.; Dhir, A.; Kaur, P.; Zafar, N.; Alrasheedy, M.	*Why do people share fake news? Associations between the dark side of social media use and fake news sharing behavior*	*Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*	2019
Turcotte, J.; York, C.; Irving, J.; Scholl, R. M.; Pingree, R. J.	*News Recommendations from Social Media Opinion Leaders: Effects on Media Trust and Information Seeking*	*Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*	2015
Vosoughi, S.; Roy, D.; Aral, S.	*The spread of true and false news online*	*Science*	2018

Second cluster (green)			
Berger, J.; Milkman, K. L.	*What Makes Online Content Viral?*	*Journal of Marketing Research*	2012
Bobkowski, P. S.	*Sharing the News: Effects of Informational Utility and Opinion Leadership on Online News Sharing*	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	2015
Bright, J	*The Social News Gap: How News Reading and News Sharing Diverge*	*Journal of Communication*	2016
Gil de Zúñiga, H.; Jung, N.; Valenzuela, S.	*Social Media Use for News and Individuals' Social Capital, Civic Engagement and Political Participation*	*Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication*	2012
Gottfried, J.; Shearer, E.	*News use across social media platforms*	(Book)	2019
Hermida, A.; Fletcher, F.; Korell, D.; Logan, D.	*SHARE, LIKE, RECOMMEND Decoding the social media news consumer*	*Journalism Studies*	2012
Kümpel, A. S.; Karnowski, V.; Keyling, T.	*News Sharing in Social Media: A Review of Current Research on News Sharing Users, Content, and Networks*	*Social Media + Society*	2015
Oeldorf-Hirsch, A.; Sundar, S. S.	*Posting, commenting, and tagging: Effects of sharing news stories on Facebook*	*Computers in Human Behavior*	2015
Trilling, D.; Tolochko, P.; Burscher, B.	*From Newsworthiness to Shareworthiness: How to Predict News Sharing Based on Article Characteristics.*	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	2017
Weeks, B. E.; Holbert, R. L.	*Predicting Dissemination of News Content in Social Media: A Focus on Reception, Friending, and Partisanship*	*Journalism & Mass Communication Quarterly*	2013

Source: Own elaboration.

4. Discussion and conclusions

The dissemination of news on social media is a relatively nascent area of study and is not yet a truly mature field of research. A group of authors who write consistently on the subject seems to be taking shape, but very few of them have a high number of citations. Allusions to one of the first papers to be published on news sharing appears to be the most remarkable, as it seems to have reached its peak ten years after its publication[1]. The annual growth of the thematic line has seen an exponential growth since 2019 (especially in 2020 and 2021, coinciding with the thriving number of works on *fake news*). The ten most cited articles include three that were published in the most recent period and were closely linked to the theoretical conceptualisation that this study is based on.

In conclusion, the results showed some signs of immaturity if we consider the lack of continuity in authorship; the poor concurrence between specialised journals and the most cited authors and papers; and the lack of expansion of both keyword clusters and articles that are usually cited together. In this regard, there is a certain tendency to use generic keywords that are not very precise, which fail to narrow down the object of study, or even explicitly avoid defining the concept altogether. As the co-citation analysis demonstrates, it is this relative 'vagueness' that leads to news sharing being studied from outside the field of Communication Studies. However, while studies on news sharing are conducted by researchers from heterogeneous fields, this has not translated into greater interdisciplinarity

In summary, the line of research within which this study is framed runs parallel to the detailed observation of the dissemination channels (social media platforms *Facebook* and *Twitter*) and other *trending* phenomena in Communication Studies (specifically, the rise of

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fake news), in the absence of a specific theoretical foundation. The latter considerations raise a major question regarding potential new studies: Has the international pandemic and 'infodemic' context favoured the publication of specific research related to news sharing, or is this an incipient sphere with long-term development prospects? Future studies should be aimed at answering this question in order to compensate for the possible limitations of this study, starting by undertaking a comparison with other analyses that may be conducted with a similar interest.

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