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References in communication policy research: a bibliographical characterization of articles published by Spanish authors

Abstract

This paper provides a characterization of the bibliographical references of Spanish scientific articles in the field of communication policy using a bibliometric approach. It analyses 93 articles published by authors from Spanish institutions between 2002 and 2011 in major Spanish journals included on the communication section of both the IN-RECS index and the Social Sciences Citation Index. The paper examines the main references used by Spanish communication policy researchers and the typology of these references, their Spanish or international character and the most cited authors in this field. The results show the disparity and adaptability of articles depending on the scope of the journals in which they are published. Thus, articles published in international journals contain more than twice as many references as those appearing in Spanish journals. The typology is also different; articles are the most common source in international journals while books predominate in Spanish journals. These results are analyzed in the context of the institutionalized practices of scientific production approved by university assessment agencies; these are compared with the actual practices of researchers through an analysis of the main bibliographical references.

Keywords

Communication policy, scientific research, scientific journals, references, Spain

1. Introduction

Critical insights on the work carried out in a scientific field as a whole mark a point of maturity, as it means that a minimum mass of works and researchers has been reached, and that the latter begin to consider the field not only as a field but also as an object of study.

Some previous works in the field of communication policy are those by Corominas (1997) on the study of communication policy and structure in Catalonia, and by Sarikakis (2008), which focuses on European research. Both texts are essays written by well-known authors with considerable academic reputation and experience. In

contrast, Casado and Fernández-Quijada (2013) analyze Spanish scientific production on communication policy applying bibliometric techniques. In addition, this type of approach based on the quantitative measurement of scientific production has also been applied to other fields of communication sciences in Spain, such as the political economy of communication (Almiron & Reig, 2007), advertising (Marcos Recio, Martínez Pestaña & Blasco López, 2012; Martínez Pestaña, 2011) or public relations (Xifra & Castillo, 2006). In other cases, studies have focused on specific objects of study like radio (Repiso, Torres & Delgado, 2011a; Rodero, 2009), television (Repiso, Torres and Delgado, 2011b) or cinema (Repiso, Delgado and Torres, 2011).

The results of Casado and Fernández-Quijada (2013) show that Spanish research in communication policy has mainly a national scope, dealing with national topics and carried out in the longest-standing communication faculties. Important methodological shortcomings can be detected in many of the articles, which can be characterized more as essays than as research articles in the strict sense; in many cases this prevents their reproducibility, a basic characteristic of any scientific contribution. Documentary analysis stands out clearly as the most usual research technique, although it is not often used with sophistication.

This article is based on the application of bibliometric techniques to what is currently considered the main means for disseminating research in the social sciences: the scientific article. Specifically, it analyzes ten years (from 2002 to 2011) of bibliographical references in scientific articles on communication policy published in Spanish and international journals by authors affiliated to Spanish institutions. The goal is to find out the main citation patterns and to analyze them in the context of the development of the study of communication policy. Underlying this proposal is the idea that the references should enable relational analyses to be made, based on the concept that these citations are a form of recognition of their peers by the authors of articles (Leydesdorff, 1998).

This paper proposes to deepen understanding of the state of the art of research on communication policy in Spain through an analysis of bibliographical references. Thus, the first research question focuses on the typology of documents cited in order to know the main references used by researchers affiliated to Spanish institutions.

RQ1: What are the main references of research articles on communication policy published by Spanish authors?

It also seems relevant to enquire about the influence exercised by Spanish and international references, thus making it possible to evaluate the degree of internationality, a factor associated with scientific maturity.

RQ2: What is the weight of Spanish and international references for Spanish authors dealing with communication policy?

Additionally, it is possible to isolate the most influential authors through the number of citations generated:

RQ3: Who are the most cited authors by Spanish scholars in this field?

Moreover, in all cases we analyze whether and how the patterns of references employed change according to the article's publication in a Spanish or international journal. This enables evaluation of the "price of internationality", that is, whether publication in international journals entails a change in the patterns of citation, as observed for communication sciences in Spain as a whole (Fernández-Quijada, Masip & Bergillos, 2013).

2. Method and sample

This article is based on a bibliometric analysis of research on communication policy in Spain. The analysis takes articles as the prime example of research in this field; as noted above, these are the principal means for the dissemination of academic research. At the same time, it is also important to point out that the nationality of the institution to which researchers were affiliated – and not the nationality of the researchers themselves – was considered the criterion for describing the nationality of an article, since this is the criterion for cataloguing texts on bibliographical databases. That is, when the text mentions “research in Spain”, it is referring to articles published by researchers affiliated to Spanish institutions.

The sample covers a period of ten years from 2002 to 2011. Although the sample was taken in the year 2013, it only extends as far as 2011 because of the difficulty in accessing some articles on some international databases due to the temporary blocking of issues. In order to avoid having different sample periods for articles from foreign and Spanish journals, it was decided to limit the scope of the sample to 2011.

With the aim of achieving the maximum number of articles, two samples were prepared: a “Spanish” sample for the texts included in Spanish journals, and an “international” one for considering non-Spanish journals in which articles by authors affiliated to Spanish universities might appear. The “Spanish” sample includes articles published in the journals situated in the three first quartiles of the IN-RECS (Impact Index of Spanish Journals on Social Sciences) classification for the communication field according to the latest data available at the time the study was made, those referring to 2011 (beta version). These journals were: *Comunicar*, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, *Comunicación y Sociedad*¹, *Estudios sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*, *Trípodos*, *Ξer*, *Doxa Comunicación*, *Anàlisi*, *Questiones Publicitarias*, *Telos*, *Icono14*, *Ámbitos*, *Comunicación y Hombre* and *Cuadernos de Información y Comunicación*. Except for *Telos* and *Icono14*², all the journals were found on the ISOC database of the Spanish National Research Council (*Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas* – CSIC).

In order to carry out the search in ISOC each journal was considered individually. Using the “basic fields” search option that includes the title of the publication, the abstract of the article, identifiers and descriptors, a search was made for the following terms: *política* (policy), *regulación* (regulation), *ley* (law) and *legislación* (legislation).

The sample of “international” articles was created using the Web Of Science database. In this case it should be pointed out that the articles of the three Spanish journals indexed at that time were not taken into account: *Comunicar*, *Comunicación y Sociedad* and *Estudios Sobre el Mensaje Periodístico*. As well as being included in the Spanish sample, their publication patterns are defined more by their nationality than by their inclusion in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) (Fernández-Quijada, Masip & Bergillos, 2013). The search was carried out using the “advanced search” option; the 2002-2011 period was considered; Spain was selected as the country; “article” as the type of document; Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) for the database; and, finally, the results were filtered by the communication area. On the basis of these filtering options a search was made for the four terms mentioned above: *policy*, *regulation*, *law* and *legislation*.

¹ This journal changed its name to *Communication & Society* since October 2014.

² In the case of *Telos* and *Icono14*, their data were collected from the Dialnet platform. In this platform it is not possible to find key words or descriptors for many of the articles – in the case of *Telos* the key words were not included until issue 74 (2008). For this reason we collected all the published articles and subsequently incorporated the key words and some abstracts not present in Dialnet; this information was collected from the websites of the two journals. As in the case of the other journals, an initial filtering was performed to determine articles on communication policy based on a search for the terms mentioned above.

Both the Spanish and the international samples still contained a large number of articles that had nothing to do with communication policy – the clearest case was those articles on political communication. To delete these articles from the sample, the definition of media policy – synonym for communication policy – from the specialized dictionary of Oxford University Press was used: “legal frameworks regulating the mass media as well as a vision of the role of the media more broadly within economic and cultural policy (typically including issues of national identity)” (Chandler & Munday, 2011: 267). More broadly, Chandler and Munday also explain that there are references in the public communication policy debate to issues like ownership of media companies (monopolies, public service, commercial interests), technical aspects (basically management of the radio-electric spectrum and convergence with other services), content (quality, decency, defamation) and questions related to access to the media.

As a result of this process, the final sample was formed by 93 articles: 77 published in Spanish journals and 16 in international journals, since an article from *International Journal of Mobile Communications* was dropped from the list because the authors of this paper were unable to access it.

Following this process, a disambiguation on authorships in the bibliographical references was conducted. Whether resulting from different systems of bibliographical citation used by each journal or from errors in the citation itself, the same author can appear with different names. Thus, use of one or two surnames – a common practice for Spanish authors –, use of the initial or the full first name, or inclusion or omission of accents made it necessary to carry out a manual revision of the references to group those authors cited in different ways.

Once the selection and disambiguation of the sample had been completed, content analysis protocol was applied to the references included in each article (table 1).

Table 1. Typology of references considered

Type of reference	Field
Articles	Spanish
	International
Books	Spanish
	International
Book chapters	Spanish
	International
General press	Spanish
	International
Specialized press	Spanish
	International
Legislation	Regional/local
	Spanish
	European
	International
Rulings	
Ph.D. dissertations	
Websites	

Reports
Conference papers
Others

The different types of references were determined upon an analysis of a part of the sample that enabled us to obtain the most accurate description possible of the different types of resources employed. On the basis of this first analysis a total of eleven references were identified that were used for the subsequent analysis:

Articles: texts included in scientific journals were considered. A differentiation was made within this category between Spanish and international journals.

Books and book chapters: with respect to books a distinction was drawn between books and book chapters since in many cases book chapters are independent works in themselves. For both articles and books the Spanish or international origin of the reference was considered. It is important to point out that in making this differentiation the nationality of the publisher was considered, and not that of the author. Thus, in those cases where a work by a foreign author was originally published in another language and subsequently issued by a Spanish publisher in one of the official languages of Spain (this could be the case with Umberto Eco or Daniel Hallin and Paolo Mancini), it was considered a Spanish reference, just as a work by a Spanish author issued by a foreign publishing company was considered an international reference.

General press and specialized press: a distinction was drawn between general and specialized publications in order to observe the degree to which they were utilized and, as in the previous categories, a differentiation was made between Spanish and international sources.

Legislation: as a consequence of the importance of the legal framework in the study of communication policy, legislation was also included in this typology of references. In this case a distinction was drawn amongst different types of regulations, taking into consideration the administrative level: regional and local, Spanish, European (related to an official pan-European institution) and international (outside Europe).

Rulings: rulings pertaining to communication law – a part of communication policy with a long-standing tradition in Spanish academia – were also included in a differentiated way.

Ph.D. dissertations: considering the relevance of the doctoral dissertations within the academic career and the high degree of specialization of these works, it was thought relevant to include them in order to measure their real incidence in research works.

Websites: these include references to exclusively digital content and not to other types of content that might be accessible on Internet. Thus, for example, websites of digital mass media are considered as press and legal documents accessible through Internet as legislation.

Reports: a study published on a concrete issue, often periodically, involving a high level of specialization; in the majority of cases they are self-defined as such.

Conference papers: although formally a paper published in a book of proceedings can be considered a book chapter, these are treated independently as it was relevant to enquire about the role of these texts compared to other types of references; they result from an essential part of academic life.

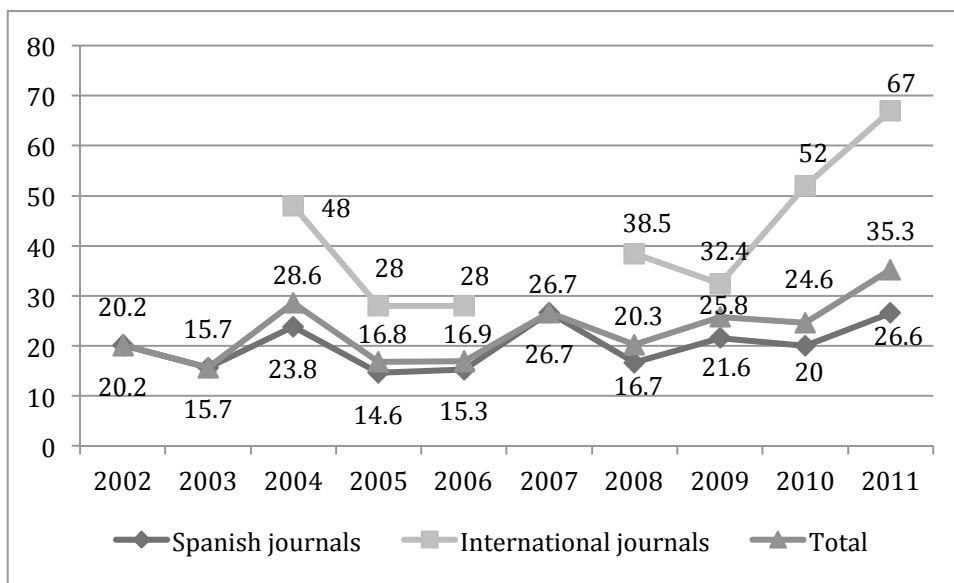
Others: in this section other references that did not fit the previous categories were considered; working papers are an example of this type.

3. Results

The first area considered in the analysis was the number of references per article. The average of references included per article was 23.9. However, the difference in the average of references in articles in Spanish and international journals was pronounced. The average of references in articles in Spanish journals was 20.1, while in foreign journals the average was more than double, 42.3.

If these data are analyzed from a temporal perspective, significant differences can be observed in the average of the different years, although it was not possible to establish any pattern that could determine a clear rising or falling trend (Chart 1). In any case, if we attend to the differentiation between articles published in Spanish and international journals, it can be observed how those years in which there were publications by Spanish authors in international journals gave higher averages in the number of references per article.

Chart 1. Average of references per article per year



3.1. Typology of references

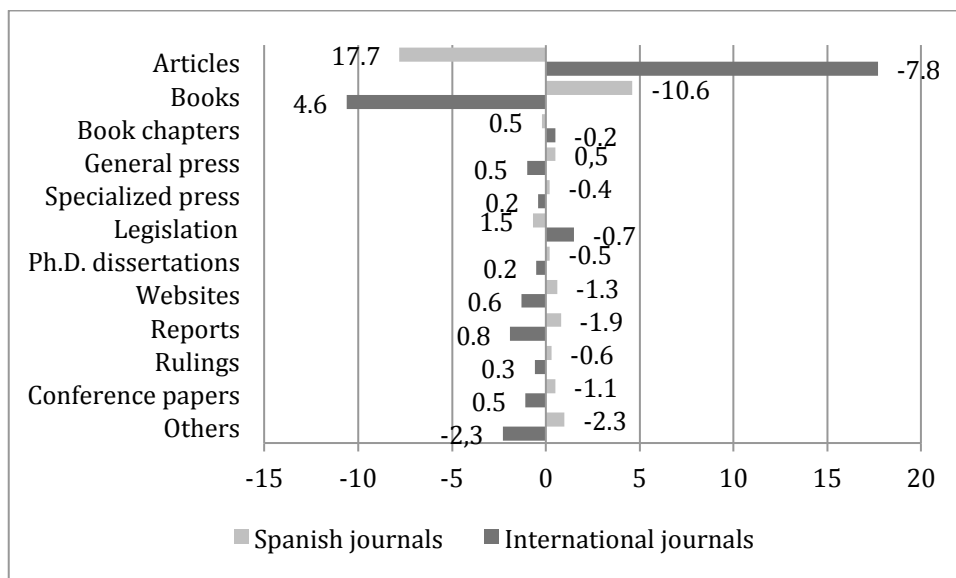
Considering the different types of references previously identified, it can be seen that books appear as the most common type of reference: 32.9% of references analyzed were books and 27% were articles (Table 2). The following most usual types of references were legislation (8.4%), reports (7.5%) and book chapters (6.2%); next were found websites (4.6%) and conference papers (2.6%). Finally, texts from press and magazines barely had a presence, whether general (1.9%) or specialized (0.7%), and the same was true for doctoral dissertations (0.8%). In any case, the bulk of the references (66.1%) corresponded to texts of an academic type like articles, books and book chapters. What is striking when considering these data was the high presence of reports and legal texts, which in both Spanish and international journals together account for over 15% of the references. In this case, this high percentage compared to other areas where strictly scientific references predominate responds to the specific nature of the field, in which legislation occupies an important position and in which documentary analysis appears as one of the most usual research techniques (Karppinen & Moe, 2012).

Table 2. Typology of references

Type of references	Spanish journals		International journals		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Books	576	37.5	151	22.3	727	32.9
Articles	295	19.2	302	44.7	597	27.0
Legislation	118	7.7	67	9.9	185	8.4
Reports	127	8.3	38	5.6	165	7.5
Others	121	7.9	31	4.6	152	6.9
Book chapters	92	6.0	45	6.7	137	6.2
Websites	80	5.2	22	3.3	102	4.6
Conference papers	47	3.1	10	1.5	57	2.6
General press	37	2.4	6	0.9	43	1.9
Ph.D. dissertations	15	1.0	2	0.3	17	0.8
Specialized press	14	0.9	2	0.3	16	0.7
Rulings	14	0.9	0	0.0	14	0.6
Total	1,536	100	676	100	2,212	100

The differences in the citation of references according to the nationality of the journal can be observed in Chart 2. The graph shows the deviation in the percentage of citations of each type of references in Spanish and international journals with respect to the sample as a whole. It can be seen that Spanish journals favor books, as against international journals that give more importance to research articles.

Chart 2. Difference of references compared to the average



3.2. Spanish and international references

The origin of the references is another key aspect for assessing the level of internationalization of the sample. In this sense, where possible the national or

international character of the references was considered; specifically, research articles, books, book chapters and the press, both general and specialized.

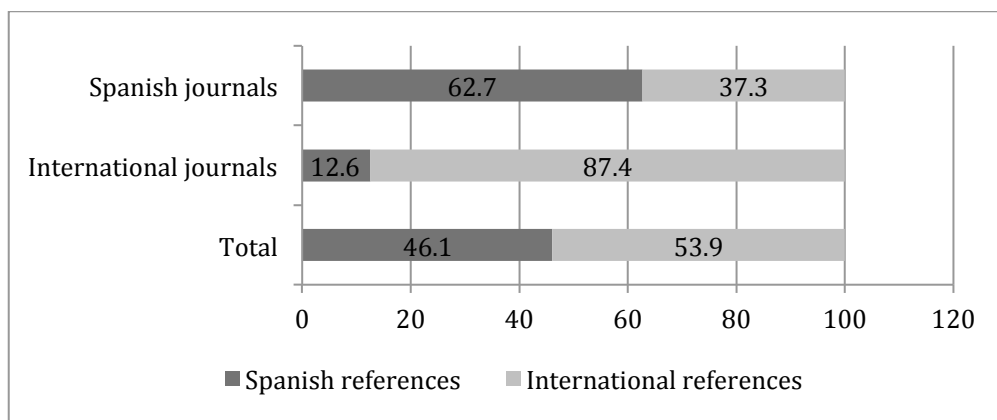
If references are considered according to the national or the international character of the journal where the articles were published, some differences can be observed (Table 3). The most substantial ones were found in the type of references cited. While in international journals references to international research articles represented 54.2% of the total, in Spanish journals this type of references barely reached 10.4%. In the case of books, international journals barely made any reference to Spanish books (4.7%) or book chapters (1.4%), compared to 34.8% and 6.3% respectively in the case of Spanish journals.

Table 3. Type of references by country of edition and journal nationality

References		Journals				Total	
Type	Country of edition	Spanish journals		International journals			
		n	%	n	%		
Articles	Spanish	190	18.7	28	5.5	218	14.3
	International	105	10.4	274	54.2	379	24.9
Books	Spanish	353	34.8	24	4.7	377	24.8
	International	223	22.0	127	25.1	350	23.0
Book chapters	Spanish	64	6.3	7	1.4	71	4.7
	International	28	2.8	38	7.5	66	4.3
General press	Spanish	27	2.7	3	0.6	30	2.0
	International	10	1.0	3	0.6	13	0.9
Specialized press	Spanish	2	0.2	2	0.4	4	0.3
	International	12	1.2	0	0.0	12	0.8
Total		1,014	100	506	100	1,520	100

The differences become even more pronounced if these references are grouped. While articles published in international journals barely had 12.6% of references to Spanish sources, the articles published in Spanish journals had more than 60% of Spanish references.

Chart 3. References by country of edition and journal nationality (%)



3.3. Most cited authors

Although the sample is obviously limited by the selection of the temporal period and the number of journals, as well as by the researchers' work in selecting the texts, it was considered interesting to list the most cited authors in this area. Table 4 shows those authors whose works were cited on at least five occasions. It is important to note that, on the one hand, self-citations were included (which in this sample are most of the citations for some authors), and that only the authorship of books, book chapters and articles are analyzed. Other texts like reports or texts from the press or magazines were not considered, since the aim was to look for the authors of scientific works that the researchers considered most relevant by noting the number of citations they received.

In total 1,461 references were identified, of which 42 authors³ who had five or more citations accounted for 316 references, which represented 21.6% of total citations – from articles, books and book chapters.

Table 4. Most cited authors

Author	Number of citations	Author	Number of citations
Enrique Bustamante	29	Andreu Casero	6
Ramón Zallo	16	Maria Corominas	6
Isabel Fernández Alonso	14	Carmina Crusafon	6
Carles Llorens	12	Jürgen Habermas	6
Robert McChesney	10	Alison Harcourt	6
Manuel Castells	9	Armand Mattelart	6
Carlos Barrera	8	Vincent Mosco	6
Montse Bonet	8	Julián Sanmartín Navarro	6
Daniel Hallin	8	Ana Azurmendi	5
Peter Humphreys	8	José Joaquín Blasco Gil	5
M ^a Trinidad García Leiva	8	Richard Collins	5
Bernard Miège	8	Gillian Doyle	5
Juan Carlos Miguel	8	Robert W. Fairlie	5
Alfonso Sánchez-Tabernero	8	Hernan Galperin	5
Octavio Getino	7	Nicholas Garnham	5
Harald Gruber	7	Lukasz Grzybowski	5
Paul Klemperer	7	Edward S. Herman	5
Emili Prado	7	Lawrence Lessig	5
Paolo Mancini	7	Philip Schlesinger	5
Nuria Almiron	6	Ana I. Segovia	5
Martín Becerra	6	John Sinclair	5

As could be expected, there was a predominance of Spanish authors. Standing out from the rest, the most cited researcher was Enrique Bustamante (29 citations), who has

³ The most cited texts included nine texts authored by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); these references were not included as the OECD is an institution and not an individual author.

dedicated most of his research to communication industries and systems rather than to communication policy. This author was followed by Ramón Zallo (16 citations), while the fifth place was occupied by the first foreign author, Robert McChesney (10 citations). It is worth observing that there were hardly researchers from Latin American institutions among the most cited authors. Amongst the 42 authors who appear with five or more citations, three were from Latin American institutions: Octavio Getino (although he was born in Spain), Martín Becerra and Hernan Galperin (this latter author was also at the University of Southern California between the years 2000 and 2005, joining the Universidad de San Andrés in Argentina in 2006). It is also worth noting that in all three cases the authors are from Argentinian academic institutions. Regarding the gender perspective, only ten of the 42 authors included in this table were women, less than a quarter. Although conclusions cannot be drawn from this figure in isolation, it could be a cause for thorough enquiry that in the academic setting, which is not usually linked to gender inequalities and where there is a notable presence of women lecturers and researchers, the majority of those most cited authors were men.

4. Discussion and conclusions

Articles on communication policy are rich in references, although as could be expected the main ones are the basic texts of research: articles and books.

As noted above, most of Spanish research in this field was published in Spanish journals (Casado & Fernández-Quijada, 2013), with a few articles in international journals – although the number is increasing. In any case, the difference between the number of references cited in articles in Spanish and international journals was very high. Articles in international journals are seen to include a much greater number of references, more than double. While there may be several reasons for these differences, it seems obvious that there is a need to strengthen this section in Spanish journals in order to formally equate the articles to international standards.

With respect to the first research question (RQ₁), important differences were found in the type of references cited: while books were the main references of research published in Spanish journals, there was a clear predominance of articles as main references in international journals (a difference of more than 25 points). The differences were not so outstanding in the rest of the types of references considered. The great difference in this point might originate in two very different reasons, one cultural and the other logistical. On the one hand, this might be a cultural question regarding the reputation of different types of publications in the Spanish and the international academia. Thus, Spanish authors who publish in international journals would be adopting the most common patterns of the Anglophone academia, either out of conviction or as a way of publishing in those publications, mainly managed by Anglophone scholars and editorial houses. On the other hand, it would be worth analyzing whether this is a question that goes beyond Spanish scientific culture and could be that there are shortcomings in Spanish universities and research centers in accessing research articles for their inclusion in the section on the state of the art of scientific works. This would indicate a material impossibility of acceding to the scientific literature used in international publications. Evidently, both factors could be feeding back into each other although more solid evidence is required in this aspect to sustain either of the two positions.

In addition, in answer to the second research question (RQ₂), great differences can be observed in the Spanish or international character of the references cited. To mention only the most striking example, in the case of Spanish journals references to Spanish articles made up 18.7% of the references and to international ones 10.7%. In international journals, however, references to Spanish journals were barely 5.5% and to international ones more

than 54.2%. It thus seems clear that there is an evident gap in citation patterns between articles published in Spanish and international journals.

Obviously, references in Spanish journals to research articles in Spanish journals are perfectly justified, due both to the national or sub-state nature of most of communication policies, and to the local nature of some of these studies. Nonetheless, there is an evident need for Spanish researchers to make use of a greater number of international references. This would make it possible to contextualize works done in Spain in an international framework and place Spanish texts in international scientific debates and standards. This practice would facilitate the possible publication of research studies in international journals. In parallel, the limited number of Spanish references in international texts would appear to indicate a gap in the issues dealt with, difficulty in internationally equating works published in Spanish journals, or other factors merely related to the hegemony of the English language in international discussion in the social sciences. This final aspect should not be ignored; as Tardy (2004) explains, the establishment of English as a *de facto* lingua franca for a large part of the scientific community contributes to the predominance of issues, methodologies and tools of scientists who publish in English, at the cost of those who do so in other languages. And it seems logical to think that this should be reflected in the bibliographical references of those works. Thus, with respect to international debate, publication of an article in a local journal in many cases condemns it to an obscurity that has more to do with accessibility than its intrinsic value (Donovan, 2010). In fact, this price that must be paid for internationalization is also beginning to be noted in Spanish communication journals (Fernández-Quijada, Masip & Bergillos, 2013).

Finally, the list of most cited authors (RQ3) only shows one author who stood out above the others and, paradoxically, this is a researcher who has developed most of his research in communication industries and systems rather than in policy. Other recognized researchers of the same field also appear in the leading positions, like Robert McChesney, Montse Bonet, Bernard Miège or Juan Carlos Miguel. It is true that communication structure and policy are very close fields and that some of the abovementioned authors would not feel altogether comfortable with these labels. Moreover, communication industries and systems – or communication structure, as it is usually known in Spain – and policy share the same section in the Spanish Association of Research in Communication (*Asociación Española de Investigación de la Comunicación* – AE-IC). This might lead one to think of communication policy as a part of communication industries and systems rather than as an autonomous field. This is undoubtedly a controversial position for some researchers and one that requires a specific study. On the other hand, it could also point to a lack of consolidation of studies in communication policy, which is still dependent on other fields. This idea is reinforced by the fact that scholars from sociology and political science are amongst the most cited of the sample.

Apart from these differences, it is also worth drawing attention to two aspects: the limited presence of references to conference papers, and the even scarcer reference to Ph.D. dissertations. In the case of conference papers, bearing in mind the great number of meetings that are organized annually both at the Spanish level and internationally, it would seem logical for greater consideration to be given to these works. For example, AE-IC has a section on communication policy, which publishes its proceedings, as does the Latin Union of Political Economy of Information, Communication and Culture (*Unión Latina de Economía Política de la Información, la Comunicación y la Cultura* – ULEPICC), an association with regular and frequent meetings in the field of communication policy. However, as the results of the analysis show, references to works produced in these frameworks are scarce. Making greater use of such references would be a form of showcasing the value of these meetings and their contents. It would also be a way of proceeding beyond the coveted ISBN number for inclusion in the curriculum of the National Agency for University Quality Assessment

and Accreditation of Spain (*Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación – ANECA*) or the corresponding regional agency, part of the already famous “ANECA effect” (Soriano, 2008).

Similarly, attending to the results shown above, Ph.D. dissertations account for a minute part of the references. While it is true that a large part of the information in dissertations is subsequently reproduced in articles or books, this gives the impression that there is a considerable lack of awareness about research activity in this area. Bearing in mind the great effort involved in producing a doctoral thesis – a phase that the majority of researchers pass through – and considering that this is one of the fundamental pillars of academic life, it is disconcerting that they later barely find a space in academic texts. It seems that authors look almost exclusively to established authors without making the effort to explore amongst the theses of new researchers. It is important to recall that the enormous task of reading theses using microfiches has already come to an end and they can be consulted openly using databases.

On balance, this work makes it possible to observe how the study of scientific production enables light to be thrown on how a scientific field is structured, helping to explain some of its trends and, by extension, its strengths and shortcomings.

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