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Analysis of the productivity and impact of communication research in Spain and Latin America (1980-2022)

Análisis de la productividad e impacto de la investigación en comunicación en España y América Latina (1980-2022)

Análise da produtividade e impacto da pesquisa em comunicação na Espanha e América Latina (1980-2022)

Bertran Salvador-Mata, Universidad Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona , España (bertran.salvador@upf.edu)

ABSTRACT | This article examines the discipline of communication in the five Spanish-speaking countries with the highest scientific output in the Web of Science (WoS), ranked in order: Spain, Chile, Mexico, Argentina, and Colombia. It uses the algorithmic clustering tool citation topic (CT) from InCites (Clarivate Analytics) to create unique groupings of scientific works based on their citation relationships. Based on this original cluster, various indicators are analyzed to assess impact, such as citations per article, the proportion of articles in SSCI versus ESCI, and quartiles. The evolution of international collaboration is also examined, and data is broken down by universities. Spain is the leader in production and indexed journals, perpetuating the hegemony of the Global North, although Chile has the best impact indicators. Mexico is in the midfield, while Colombia and Argentina are characterized by relatively low production and impact, apart from the increase in international collaboration observed in Colombia. It is confirmed that Spanish-speaking scientific networks, especially from the Global South, are on the margins of a restrictive platform such as WoS. Finally, several strategies to improve the situation are proposed, including the review of journal indexes, the reconceptualization of research policies, and the decolonization of global science, as well as the creation of new frameworks for scientific legitimacy.

KEYWORDS: meta-research; communication; Latin America; science in communication; productivity; impact; citation topic.

HOW TO CITE

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RESUMEN | *Este artículo examina la disciplina de la comunicación en los cinco países de habla hispana con la mayor producción científica en la Web of Science (WoS), por orden: España, Chile, México, Argentina y Colombia. Utiliza la herramienta de agrupación algorítmica citation topic (CT) de InCites (Clarivate Analytics) para generar agrupaciones únicas de trabajos científicos basados en sus relaciones de citación. A partir de este clúster original, se analizan diversos indicadores para evaluar el impacto, tales como citas/artículo, la proporción de artículos en SSCI versus ESCI y el cuartil. También se explora la evolución de la colaboración internacional y se desglosan los datos por universidades. España lidera en producción y revistas indexadas, perpetuando la hegemonía del Norte Global, aunque Chile presenta los mejores indicadores de impacto. México exhibe resultados intermedios, mientras que Colombia y Argentina se caracterizan por una producción e impacto relativamente bajos, a excepción del aumento en la colaboración internacional observado en Colombia. Se confirma que las redes científicas hispanohablantes, específicamente aquellas del Sur Global, se sitúan en la periferia de una plataforma restrictiva como es WoS. Finalmente, se sugieren varias estrategias para mejorar la situación, incluyendo la revisión de los índices de revistas, la reconceptualización de las políticas de investigación y la descolonización de la ciencia global, junto con establecer nuevos marcos de legitimación científica.*

PALABRAS CLAVE**:** *meta-investigación; comunicación; América Latina; ciencia en comunicación; productividad; impacto; citation topic.*

RESUMO | Este artigo examina a disciplina da comunicação nos cinco países de língua espanhola com maior produção científica na Web of Science (WoS), pela ordem: Espanha, Chile, México, Argentina e Colômbia. Utiliza a ferramenta de agrupamento algorítmico citation topic (CT) do InCites (Clarivate Analytics) para gerar agrupamentos únicos de trabalhos científicos baseados em suas relações de citação. A partir deste agrupamento original, são analisados diversos indicadores para avaliar o impacto, tais como citações por artigo, a proporção de artigos no SSCI versus ESCI e o quartil. Também é explorada a evolução da colaboração internacional e os dados são detalhados por universidades. A Espanha lidera em produção e revistas indexadas, perpetuando a hegemonia do Norte Global, embora o Chile apresente os melhores indicadores de impacto. O México exibe resultados intermediários, enquanto a Colômbia e a Argentina caracterizam-se por uma produção e impacto relativamente baixos, exceto pelo aumento na colaboração internacional observado na Colômbia. Confirma-se que as redes científicas de língua espanhola, particularmente aquelas do Sul Global, estão situadas na periferia de uma plataforma restritiva como é a WoS. Finalmente, sugerem-se várias estratégias para melhorar a situação, incluindo a revisão dos índices de revistas, a reconceitualização das políticas de pesquisa e a descolonização da ciência global, junto com o estabelecimento de novos quadros de legitimidade científica.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: meta-pesquisa; comunicação; América Latina; ciência em comunicação; produtividade; impacto; *citation topic*.

INTRODUCTION

Communication studies are often considered a young discipline and frequently categorized as a post-discipline (Herbst, 2008; Waisbord, 2019). Among the characteristics attributed to them are the lack of a clear ontological center, the constant intertwining with other disciplines — to the point where they blur and lead to idiosyncratic research objects and methods — and a sense of constant change that drives the discipline towards new thematic horizons, as recent research shows (Salvador-Mata, 2024). Nonetheless, some researchers point out that there is a certain thematic and disciplinary consistency (Walter et al., 2018).

In Spain, the first communication faculties emerged in the 1970s with the approval of the college law that institutionalized these courses (Barrera, 2022). In Latin America, communication studies began in 1934-1935 in La Plata (Argentina) in a rather anecdotal way, following a model similar to the one proposed by Pulitzer (Fuentes-Navarro, 1989). In the 1950s, the number of schools approached a dozen, and from the 1960s and 1970s the offer increased considerably, with the number of centers tripling in some cases and gaining scientific and academic prestige (Prieto Castillo, 1986). Among the most important countries driving communication studies at the time were Brazil, Mexico, Argentina and Colombia, and to a lesser extent Chile and Peru. In the 1970s, the teaching model in Latin America shifted from one based on journalism to a more global model with degrees in social communication.

Since the emergence of communication studies, an academic community dedicated to the study of this discipline began to form. As the field matured, meta-research in communication — an academic branch that examines the functioning of the discipline by analyzing citation networks, productivity, research topics, funding, methodological choices, etc. — gained popularity to explain how the structures that influence scholarly practice work (Caffarel-Serra, 2018).

The general objective of this research is to study the scientific dynamics in five Spanish-speaking countries through the application of an algorithmic tool called citation themes, which allows the grouping of original scientific papers and the quantification of the metrics associated with them. The citation topics were used to create an original grouping of the studies to be analyzed. By analyzing different indicators, the following specific objectives were pursued:

1. Determine the volume of published works by country and the status of national journals in Web of Science.
2. Characterize the influence of communication science based on citation profiles and quantify indirect influence variables (citations per article, percentage of papers in the SSCI index, journal quartiles).

3. Study the development of international collaboration (between a national institution and at least one international institution) in the countries studied.
4. Break down productivity and impact data by college to identify the main centers of production.

In addition, as an exploratory objective, this study aims to provide methodological evidence for the use of citation themes in infometric studies, in line with previous research (Herrero-Solana & Piedra-Salomón, 2022; Salvador-Mata, 2024).

STATE OF THE ART

Meta-research in the field of communication has gained importance in recent decades, as it is able to identify academic dynamics and explain the scientific reality of the discipline. It also provides a useful tool for guiding research policy and improving scientific practice. There are several examples of this, ranging from studies of scientific productivity in databases and journals (Castillo-Esparcia et al., 2012; Martínez-Nicolás, 2008; Repiso & Moreno-Delgado, 2022; Trabadela-Robles et al., 2020), the analysis of doctoral theses (Lozano-Ascensio et al., 2020), collaboration models (Escribà & Cortiñas, 2013) and research typology (Goyanes et al., 2018; Martínez-Nicolás et al., 2017), to name but a few. There are also various studies that aim to map the academic discipline, including research on journal indexing (González-Pardo et al., 2020), studies on the nature of research and meta-research in communication in Latin America in general (Fuentes-Navarro, 2019; Krohling Kunsch et al., 2018; Waisbord, 2014) or by country, such as in Chile (Lagos-Lira, 2018; Lazcano-Peña & Reyes-Lillo, 2020), Mexico (Fuentes-Navarro, 1988) or Brazil (Maldonado, 2014). Comparative studies between Spain and Latin America have identified differences in the theoretical approaches used for scientific work (Piñeiro-Naval & Morais, 2019), which in a way coincides with how the Global South reinterprets and re-reads the epistemology imposed by the Global North (Waisbord, 2023). In this sense, Moyano (2017) notes a shift in the thematic focus of communication studies in Latin America and a relative predominance of the critical paradigm.

However, the rise of communication research in Spain and Latin America faces a challenge in terms of academic impact. On the one hand, the global scholarly ecosystem is dominated by the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany (Navas, 2017). These countries of the Global North, particularly the United States, set the global trend in communication scholarship, leaving non-English-speaking academic networks on the sidelines. Thus, in the JCR SSCI journals of the Web of Science (WoS) database, there is a strong bias

towards editorial boards from the United States in first place and other English-speaking countries in second place (Albuquerque et al., 2020). In addition, there are close relationships between the different editorial boards, with a small group of individuals involved in several of them, thus influencing systemic trends in communication science (Goyanes & De-Marcos, 2020).

The predominance of the United States and Anglo-Saxon countries, followed by the rest of the Global North, is particularly evident in a database as restrictive as WoS compared to Scopus or Dimensions (Singh et al., 2021). In this sense, when comparing WoS and Scopus, Santa and Herrero-Solana (2010) point out that the number of titles indexed in Scopus from some of the Latin American countries analyzed is in some cases five times higher than those indexed in WoS. It is not surprising that the index with the highest proportion of Latin American journals is Latindex (where, according to Castillo-Esparcia (2012), Spain also dominates), that there are none in the JCR-SSCI index and only 15 in the JCR-ESCI (Arroyave-Cabrera & González-Pardo, 2022). In the case of Spain, there are two journals in the JCR-SSCI and up to 24 in the JCR-ESCI (considering 2022 data), highlighting Spain's predominant role as part of the Global North, although the vast majority of its journals are not indexed in the JCR-SSCI.

The barrier to achieving a presence in WoS is twofold: the legitimacy circuits make it easier for authors from the Global North to publish (Waisbord, 2023; Mosbah-Natanson & Gingras, 2013) and make it more difficult for non-English journals to be indexed in this database (Navas, 2017). The difficulty of including (and maintaining) journals from the Global South in WoS is a limitation of the impact values in these countries, which respond to the structures of the global science system itself.

In addition to these structural constraints, there are other obstacles in Latin America and Spain, such as the lack of professionalization of the editorial teams (Salager-Meyer, 2015), the fact that these journals are usually based at universities, unlike the large English-language publishers (Taylor & Francis, Elsevier, Wiley, Springer or SAGE), which concentrate most scientific journals both geographically and entrepreneurially (Collyer, 2016). In fact, according to Arroyave-Cabrera and González-Pardo (2022), 81.89 of Latin American journals come from universities. This is compounded by the lack of funding, which limits the ability of these publications to access resources such as advanced editorial management platforms, plagiarism detection tools and training opportunities for their staff. Linguistic specificity in an academic context that revolves around English (Andersen, 2000; Demeter, 2018) further marginalizes the academic efforts of non-English speaking countries.

These factors help to explain the marginal role of Spanish-speaking networks in global academia, which is even more pronounced in the Latin American paradigm. This work aims to help define productive dynamics, identify trends, and propose solutions for decolonizing global science.

METHODOLOGY

This work is embedded in infometric research, a branch of science that, according to some authors (Bawden & Robinson, 2012; Egghe & Rousseau, 1990), encompasses bibliometrics, scientometrics, citation analysis and theoretical aspects of information retrieval. This paper follows the classic definition of Tague-Sutcliffe (1992), who describes infometrics as the quantitative study of information in any of its forms and in relation to any social group.

Methodological tool

The algorithmic tool Citation Topics, developed by Clarivate Analytics (Potter, 2020) and available in InCites, was used for data collection. This tool generates original algorithmic groupings of works (understood as any indexed product, not just research articles) collected in WoS since 1980. It uses a Leiden-type clustering system.

This clustering is original and unique (each work can only be found in one category) and results in a hierarchical classification with ten macro-topics comprising 326 meso-topics, which in turn are subdivided into 2449 micro-topics. This algorithmic grouping has been validated in other infometric studies (Herrero-Solana & Piedra-Salomón, 2022; Salvador-Mata, 2024). In addition, grouping by Leiden type ensures linkage between the clustered communities and provides guarantees of methodological rigor (Traag et al., 2019). Reliability is complemented by the exclusion of approximately 25% of the total WoS works that were not categorized due to lack of information and removed from the analysis to ensure that the products studied have the information required for the analysis.

The use of this tool allows for original and innovative infometric approaches, as the corpus analyzed is unique and does not follow the indexing of journals or search criteria, but is obtained through algorithmic grouping based on citation relationships.

Data collection

A unique universe of scientific products was created using the Citation Topic (CT) tool. The study period was set between 1980and 2022, with 1980 being the first functional year for the use of this tool and 2022 being the last year with complete data at the time of the study.

The meso-citation topic of communication was chosen to define the universe, which falls under the macro-citation topic of social sciences. The algorithm identifies a node of 175,596 works, including the different indices of the WoS Flagship (SSCI, AHCI, ESCI...). Of these, 9,124 are from Spain, 885 from Mexico, 857 from Chile, 718 from Argentina and 660 from Colombia, as these are the Spanish-speaking countries with the highest number of works in this category. The works collected in this process are used to evaluate the scientific production, which is understood as the amount of works indexed in WoS within CT Communication and with at least one affiliation from each nationality. According to data from Arroyave-Cabrera and González-Pardo (2022), the Latin American countries with the highest number of communication journals (excluding Brazil) are Argentina, Colombia and Chile, which confirms the sample selection made in this article.

A series of indicators were identified for each of these works (title, abstract, number of citations, form of authorship, signing institutions, journal, indexing, etc.).

Data analysis

The data and indicators were obtained from a total of 12,334 works belonging to the meso-citation theme of communication and signed by at least one institution based in one of the five countries studied. The indicators obtained made it possible to carry out analyzes, either through the InCites interface or through statistical calculations in Excel, to quantify the productivity of the country, the ratio of citations per work, the distribution and evolution of international collaboration in these countries, the distribution of works by journal quartile and the distribution of productivity and impact by institution.

For the work in Excel, the data was exported in .csv format, which contains most of the indicators (in some cases the variables had to be applied directly in the InCites interface).

RESULTS

Productivity by country

According to the WoS database and the algorithmic grouping of the meso-citation theme Communication, Spain is the third most productive country in the world in the field of communication, far ahead of the other Latin American countries (in order, Mexico, Chile, Argentina and Colombia) (figure 1). These results are consistent with the distribution of journals in each country in the WoS database. Spain leads with two journals in the JCR-SSCI index (Comunicar and

Profesional De La Información) and up to 24 in the JCR-ESCI 1[1]1 category, which explains why this country has such high productivity compared to other Spanish-speaking countries. Chile follows far behind with three journals in the JCR-ESCI index (Cuadernos.info, Perspectivas de la Comunicación, and Comunicación y Medios). There are two Argentinean journals in JCR-ESCI (Austral Comunicación and Question), one Colombian journal (Palabra Clave) and none from Mexico.

Spain extends its productivity to all Spanish-language journals. If we break down the works included in this study by journal and compare them with the affiliations, we find that 82% of the products collected in the 26 Spanish journals are signed by an institution from that country. In the Chilean journals, 38% are signed by Spanish institutions, compared to 28% by Chilean institutions. In the Colombian journal, 45% of the documents come from Spanish institutions, compared to 21% from Colombian institutions. In contrast, 61 of the two Argentinean journals contain Argentinean papers, followed by those signed by Spanish institutions (16%).

1. *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social; Review of Communication Research; Communication & Society-Spain; Revista Española de Comunicación en Salud; Revista Icono14-Revista Científica de Comunicación y Tecnologías; Revista Mediterranea Comunicacion-Journal of Communication; Analisi-Quaderns de Comunicació i Cultura; Trípodos; Index Comunicación; AdComunica-Revista Científica de Estrategias Tendencias e Innovación en Comunicación; Vivat Academia; Doxa Comunicación; Revista de Comunicación de la SEECI; CIC-Cuadernos de Informacion y Comunicacion; Obra Digital-Revista de Comunicación; Revista Internacional de Relaciones Públicas; Comunicación-Revista de Recerca i d'Ànalisi; Fonseca-Journal of Communication; Comunicación y Hombre; Mediaciones Sociales; Revista Internacional de Comunicación y Desarrollo; Área Abierta; IC-Revista Científica de Información y Comunicación; Documentación de las Ciencias de la Información.*

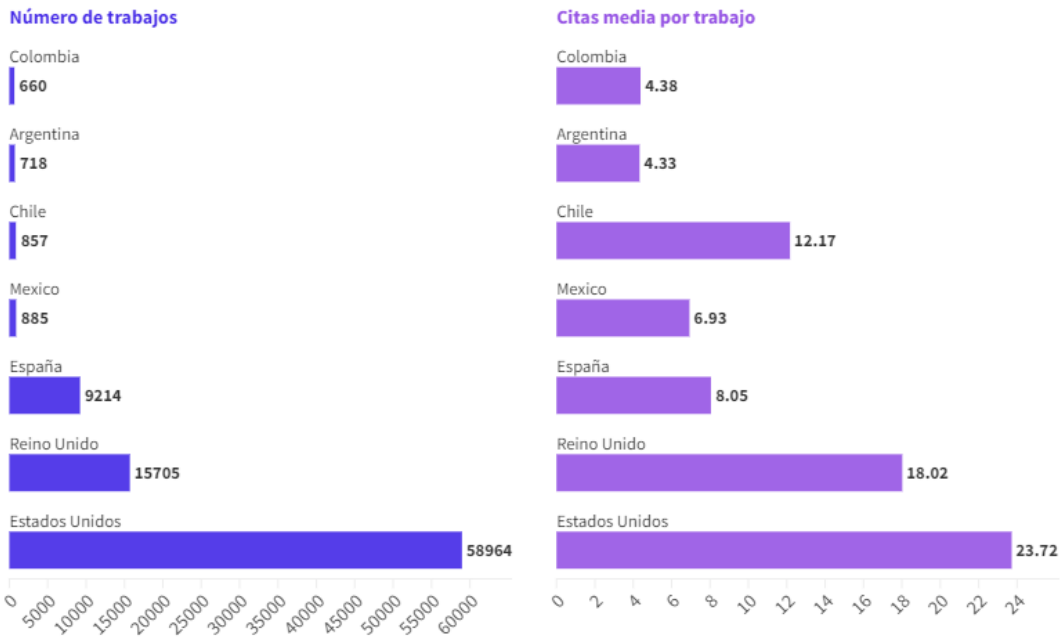

Figure 1. Production of each country within the meso topic *Communication* (1980-2022) (left). Average citations per article (ratio between total citations of published works) (right)

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

Impact of the science in communication by countries

The Spanish-speaking countries surveyed have a lower ratio of citations per work compared to the United States and the United Kingdom, the leaders in this field. The country with the best ratio is Chile, with 12.17 citations per article, followed by Spain (8.05), Mexico (6.93), Colombia (4.38) and Argentina (4.33).

Figure 2 shows the proportion of articles published by each country in JCR-SSCI Index journals. Chile has the highest proportion and is on a par with the United States and the United Kingdom. The countries with the lowest proportion of articles published in journals with an impact factor (JIF) are Colombia and Argentina. Spain and Mexico have lower indices than Chile, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Figure 3 shows the quartile distribution of journals for articles published in JCR-SSCI. The United States and the United Kingdom show the expected pattern with an upward trend (more articles in Q1, followed by Q2, Q3 and finally Q4). The literature (De-Moya-Anegón, 2020) states that better indexed journals tend to publish more papers and therefore have a higher proportion of articles.

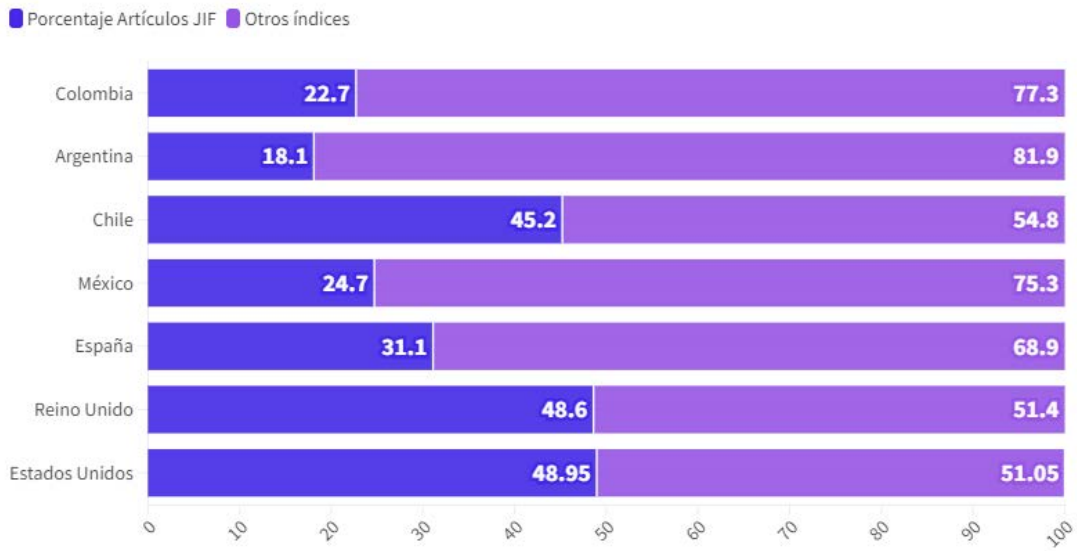

Figure 2. Proportion of articles indexed in journals with an impact factor (JIF: journals indexed in JCR-SSCI). Other indices refer to JCR-ESCI or other indices in WoS such as AHCI

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

Figure 3. Percentage distribution based on quartiles of scientific production published in JIF journals from the five countries analyzed and the two leading countries in this field

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

In the case of Spain, an anomaly can be observed: the trend is flat, with approximately the same number of articles in Q1 as in Q2 and Q3.

Although it is abnormal behavior, it is less pronounced than in more specific fields such as journalism studies (Salvador-Mata et al., 2023). Mexico, Argentina and Chile follow a generally expected upward trend, although all three show an increase in the proportion of articles published in Q4.

These figures only reflect papers published in JIF journals, which explains why Argentina published almost 40% of its articles in Q1 but these are less significant in its overall output, with only 18.1% of its total output published in JIF journals (Figure 2), similar to Mexico. On the other hand, Chile's data is robust: about 35% of JIF articles are published in Q1, representing about 45% of its total output. Colombia shows an anomalous behavior, with a higher share of Q2 articles compared to Q1.

Evolution of international collaboration

Figure 4 shows the percentage of works with international collaboration by year, starting with 2015 (earlier years were not included due to the small volume of works collected, which increases variability). A trend towards increasing international collaboration can be seen in all countries, with Spain having the lowest percentage in this area. In the past, Chile was the country with the most international collaboration, around 50% in the ten years analyzed. However, in the last year (2022), Colombia shows a higher share of international cooperation, reaching 62%, with the increase continuing since 2017. Mexico and Argentina show a slight continuous increase in international cooperation, although they remain at a lower level compared to Chile and Colombia.

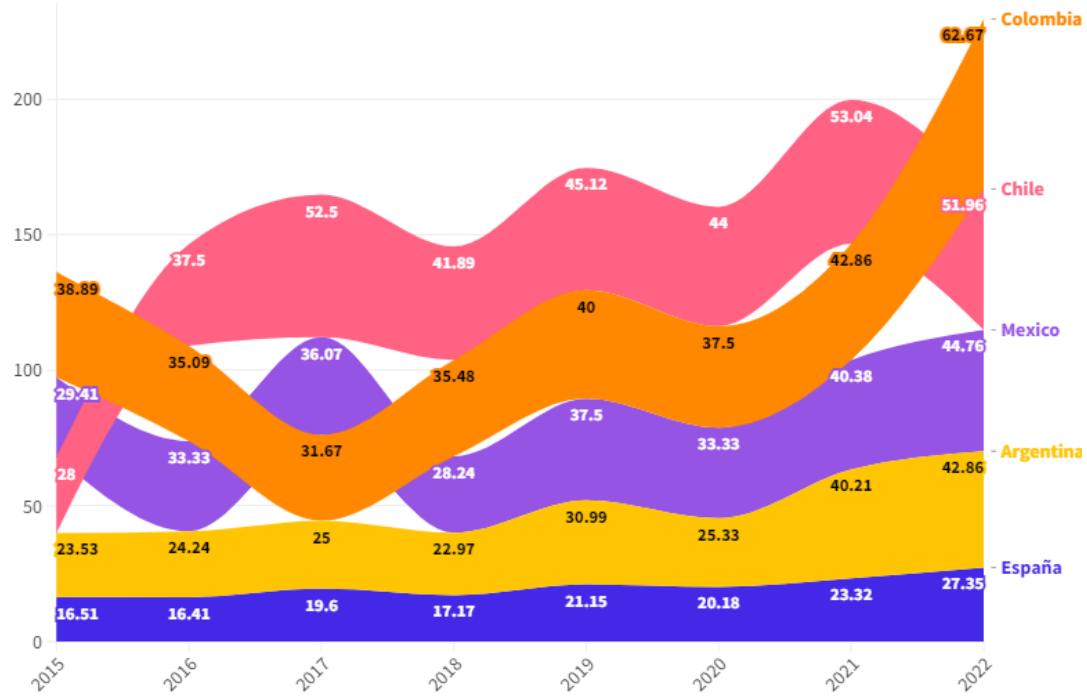

Figure 4. Development of international cooperation between the analyzed countries in a year-on-year comparison based on WoS data for the meso-citation topic of Communication

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

Data by university

Figure 5 shows the five most productive universities in each country and their ratio of citations per paper. Chilean universities have the greatest impact in terms of citations: the Universidad Diego Portales and the Universidad de Santiago de Chile generate the most citations per article, while the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile produces the most works, although this lowers its ratio of citations per article. In Spain, the Universitat Pompeu Fabra and the Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona have a citationrate per article above the national average, and all Spanish universities are more productive than their Latin American counterparts. In Mexico, the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana stands out in terms of influence; the most productive institutions are the Tecnológico de Monterrey and the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México.

In Argentina, output is concentrated in one of the most important national institutions, the National Council for Scientific and Technical Research (CONICET), and the Universidad de Buenos Aires, resulting in a low ratio of citations per article. However, the Universidad de San Andrés competes with the leading Chilean universities in terms of citation performance. In Colombia, a different pattern can be observed compared to Argentina: the volume of papers is similar, but no single university centralizes this output. Universidad de La Sabana leads in both productivity and impact, almost doubling the national average in citations.

Figure 6 shows the distribution of articles by quartile in these universities. In Spain, a flat trend can be observed across all universities, with peaks in Q3 for Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Universitat Pompeu Fabra. In Chile, the Universidad Diego Portales and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile show an upward trend, which is consistent with their high impact. However, the Universidad de Santiago de Chile shows a more anomalous pattern, with a peak in Q3, possibly indicating that, given the small volume of papers, most citations come from a small group of high impact articles, while the rest show a more modest performance.

In Mexico, the Tecnológico de Monterrey shows an upward trend. At the Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana, a large proportion of articles fall in Q1, followed by an increase in Q3, a trend that is also observed to a lesser extent at the Universidad de Guadalajara. In Argentina, the Universidad de San Andrés shows an upward trend, with most articles appearing in Q1, while the Universidad Nacional de Córdoba shows a similar trend, albeit with fewer published papers. In Colombia, the Universidad de La Sabana shows a good distribution of its articles, which corresponds to its influence, while the other universities show flat curves with peaks in Q3.

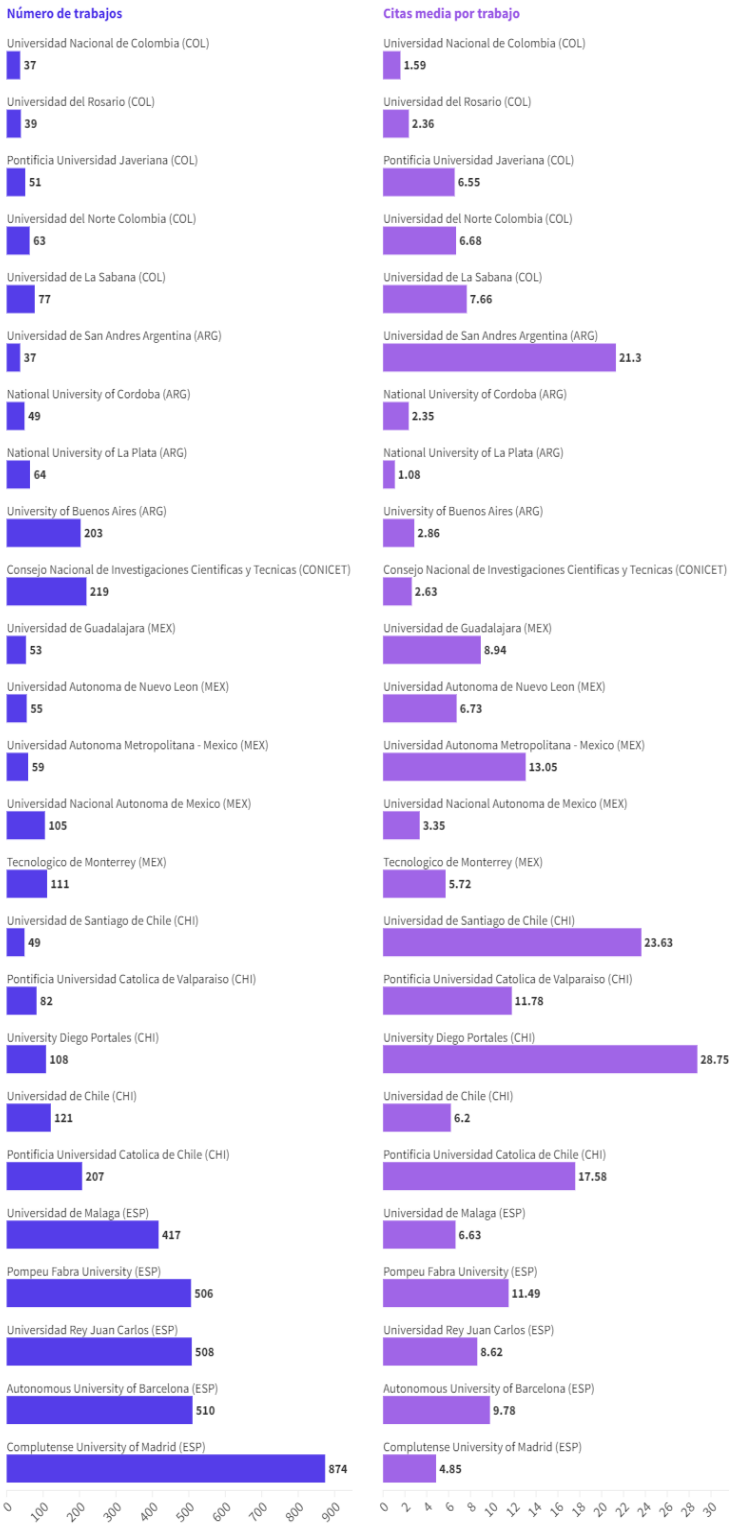

Figure 5. The five most productive universities per country and their corresponding citation ratio (citations produced per the total number of articles published by the university)

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

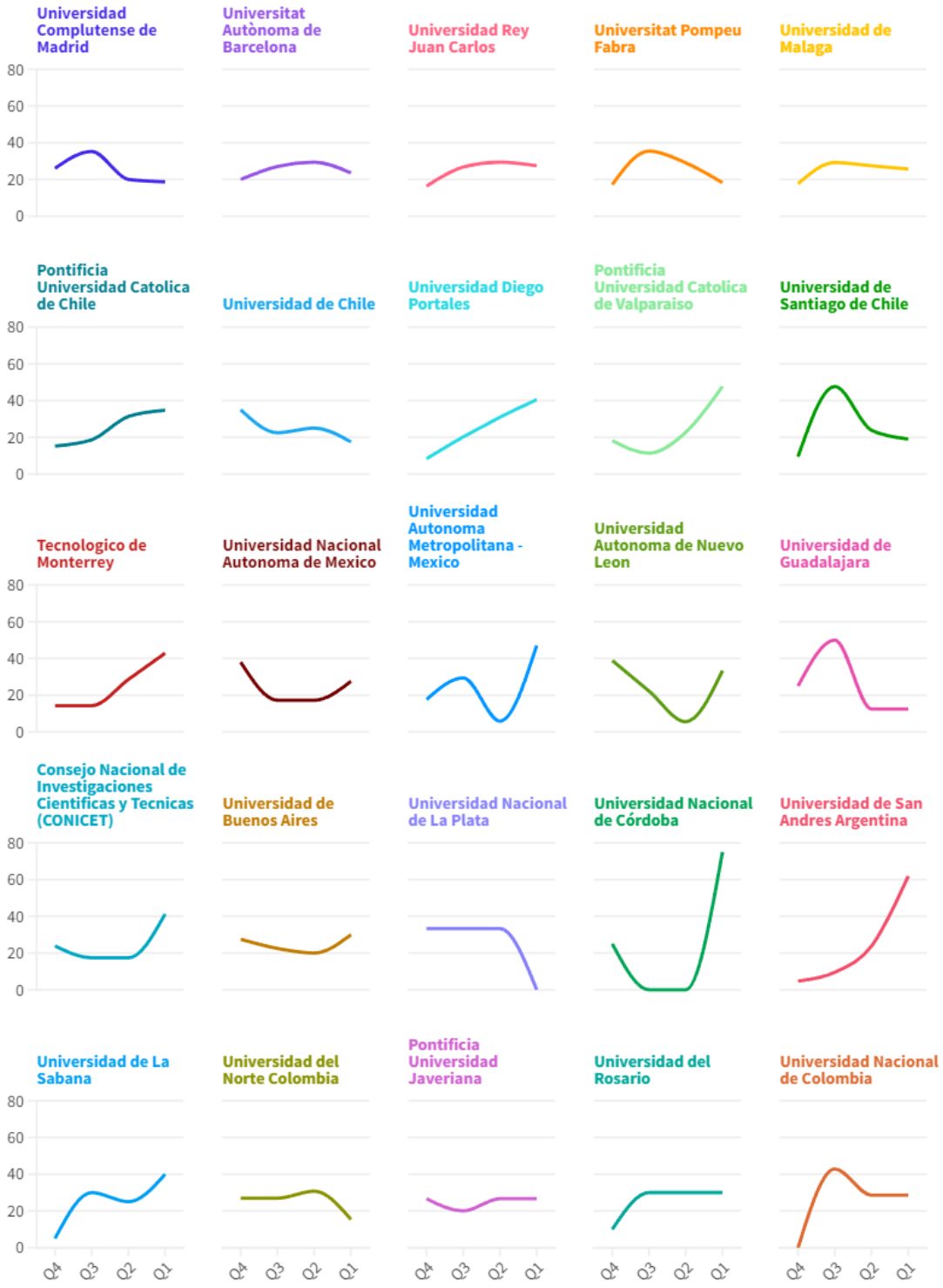

Figure 6. The five most productive universities per country and the quartile distribution of their scientific output published in JIF journals

Source: Own elaboration based on InCites data.

DISCUSSION

In the Web of Science database, Spain leads the majority of production and journals in Spanish-speaking countries, well ahead of the other four countries analyzed. Its production is comparable to that of the United Kingdom, one of the two leading countries, although the impact of its research, measured in terms of citations per article, is significantly lower. This data is consistent with previous research that has established Spain's uniqueness in journalism science (Salvador-Mata et al., 2023). This is an anomaly that is exacerbated in the WoS, where the gap between the number of journals based in Spain compared to those from Latin American countries is one of the largest (González-Pardo et al., 2020). Spain (26) has managed to include more journals in WoS by the end of 2022 than Chile (3), Argentina (2), Colombia (1) and Mexico (0) combined, which partly explains its higher productivity. This phenomenon is a peculiarity in the field of communication: Spain publishes 10% of WoS journals in the field of communication studies, while the share of Spanish journals worldwide is around 2.5% (Navas, 2017).

Although Spain is the most productive country and publishes the most journals, Chile has better impact indicators (proportion of articles in JCR-SSCI, more citations per article and high international collaboration), followed by Spain, Mexico and finally Argentina and Colombia. Chile thus has robust research indicators, although previous studies have pointed out the limitations in Chilean communication science (Lagos-Lira, 2018).

Spanish universities are consistently the most productive, but Chilean universities generate more citations per article. Spain concentrates much of its production in national journals (Salvador-Mata, 2024), a similar pattern to Argentina, where 135 of the 700 articles are published in one of the two WoS-indexed journals. In addition, Argentina concentrates much of its production in two centers, a trend that has always been observed in Latin America (Ríos Gómez & Herrero-Solana, 2005), although this concentration is only observed in Argentina in the current data. Mexico, on the other hand, shows a production muscle comparable to other Latin American experiences, although there are no WoS-indexed journals. Colombia has similar indirect impact markers to Argentina, and much of its production is concentrated in the journal Palabra Clave of the Universidad de La Sabana, one of the leading journals in the Colombian context (as observed by Arroyave-Cabrera et al., 2020).

These results are consistent with earlier studies: Waisbord (2023) explains how the academic circuit is dominated by the Global North, particularly the United States and Western Europe. Male and Western researchers are the main authors in the journals with the highest impact (Trepte & Loths, 2020), and most come

from U.S.A. universities, with white American men receiving the most citations (Freelon et al., 2023). Furthermore, a small group of researchers are networked and participate in various editorial boards of leading WoS journals (Goyanes & De-Marcos, 2020). This study is consistent with these findings and highlights the productive hegemony of Spain as a Global North country compared to the Latin American experience. However, countries such as Chile show that, despite not historically belonging to these academic circuits of meaning, they can attract and produce effective scholarly narratives. The gradual inclusion of the Global South in academic circuits, often from a critical perspective, partly explains these results (Waisbord, 2023), although there is still work to be done to challenge the dominant epistemology.

Spain's high productivity, while explained by its relative legitimacy within Global North academic circles, is sometimes understood as an anomaly (Salvador-Mata, 2024). This article explores how this productivity not only relates to the academic circuits of the Global North, but also permeates the academic circuits of the Global South, specifically Spanish-speaking countries: most articles in many Latin American journals are signed by Spanish institutions, indicating a visible pressure to publish more in Spain than in other countries. This market invasion is particularly pronounced in the field of communication. However, it does not correlate with the impact indicators, which in Spain depend heavily on the journals indexed in ESCI (Moreno-Delgado et al., 2021).

Although the pressure to publish is global, the academic paradigms, nationality of publishers, editorial boards, professional networks and historically validated and legitimized circuits (Waisbord, 2023) make it more likely for the Global North to translate this pressure into more WoS publications than for the Global South. However, the Spanish case is particularly anomalous because, although it is not part of the core group of critical countries (Navas, 2017), it is one of the most productive, proving the existence of publication pressure. In this case, this can be partly explained by the so-called ANECA effect (Delgado López-Cozar et al., 2021) and, more broadly, by the precariousness of the work (Goyanes et al., 2018) and the methods inherent to communication studies (primarily descriptive and easy-to-produce articles) (Caffarel, 2018). In addition, in the case of Latin America, three other factors should be taken into account to understand the qualitative and quantitative growth of communication studies in the early 2000s: the development of the industrial sector, the improvement of critical social indicators and the increase in the number of graduates (Moyano, 2017).

As a result, it can be observed that Spanish-speaking networks are on the fringes of the WoS framework, while Spain continues to play a central role as a

representative of the Global North. On the one hand, there are only two Spanish-language journals in the SSCI index, compared to 33 in the ESCI index. The marginal status of these journals, despite their inclusion in WoS, partly explains the impact indicators, which, with the exception of Chile, are well below those of leading countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the number of journals from Latin America in the WoS indices has decreased (9 in 2022 compared to 15 identified by Navas in 2017).

This phenomenon is exacerbated by the shift of scholarly journals in the Global North (with the notable exception of Spain) towards for-profit models capitalized by publishing groups (Collyer, 2016). This trend, which is less visible in the Spanish-speaking context, shapes scholarly structures and article selection criteria, favoring those that are most likely to be cited—typically focused on the Global North and authored by white American men (Freelon et al., 2023). This standardization reduces the identity of the journals and homogenizes them to the image of the Global North (Collyer, 2016). This makes access more difficult for the Global South and also creates a monopoly that can be prohibitively expensive for underfunded universities and libraries.

However, Spanish-speaking science shows other signs of maturity, such as a high level of international collaboration, at least in the works included in WoS (with the exception of Spain, which has a lower proportion). This could indicate that collaboration with other countries is encouraged in order to publish in journals indexed in WoS. International collaboration is often considered an indirect indicator of influence (Martínez-Nicolás, 2020; Salvador-Mata et al., 2023), so it is to be expected that this continued growth will eventually bear fruit in terms of citations in all the countries studied, although previous studies point to the difficulty of maintaining these networks given the precarious conditions of current productivity-driven science (Lazcano-Peña & Reyes-Lillo, 2020). However, critical voices point out that increasing internationalization could be driven by collaboration with the countries of the Global North, especially with the United States as an important partner (Moreno-Delgado et al., 2021), which could perpetuate the patterns of influence shaped by these regions and risks erasing academic experiences from the periphery (Mosbah-Natanson & Gingras, 2013). In this regard, future studies should identify the motivations for international collaboration on the one hand and the relationship with peripheral academia on the other in order to propose solutions to the disciplinary hegemony of the Global North.

Several factors must interact to explain the marginality of Spanish-speaking networks. First, the Global North continues to dominate the academic paradigm (Albuquerque, 2020; Mosbah-Natanson & Gingras, 2013; Waisbord, 2023), and Spain

represents this status quo in the context of the Spanish language. Second, given the uniqueness of Spanish, there is an obvious bias in favor of English. Andersen (2000) found that the main reference journals for researchers in Denmark use English, and Demeter (2018) described the predominant role of English-speaking countries in communication and media studies. Navas (2017) identified a group of leading countries in scientific publishing (the United States, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands and Germany) that publish predominantly English-language journals. Goyanes (2020) highlighted the dominance of English geography in journals and the thematic and authorship of the Global North. Ekdale and colleagues (2022) found that countries of the Global South published more in journals of journalism studies when special issues focusing on the region were published, although this was very rare and the Global South remained systematically underrepresented. Arroyave-Cabrera and colleagues (2020) described how the growth of countries such as Colombia in the WoS database was partly due to the creation of the JCR-ESCI index and subsequent indexing by Palabra Clave.

Thus, the marginalization identified has a variety of reasons that need to be addressed, firstly, to ensure the inclusion of Global South science from critical epistemological perspectives that are not dependent on or inherited from the Global North, and secondly, to create scientific circuits that meet diverse linguistic and cultural needs and are not forcibly subordinated to English. In parallel, this study confirms the applicability and potential of citation themes in bibliometric studies, in line with other research (Salvador-Mata, 2024).

Following the proposals of Waisbord (2023), who outlines three ways to legitimize Global South scholarship in the globalized landscape of communication studies (consolidation of spaces for recognition and support, maintenance of networks with an inclusive and comparative perspective, and participation in common spaces), four action initiatives are proposed below to improve the situation of Spanish-speaking science. These are presented in a double sense: on the one hand, the decolonization of academics from the Global South and, on the other, proposed solutions to promote non-English-speaking academic networks.

1. At the structural level of countries, alternative indices such as SciELO or Latindex (Collyer, 2016; Castillo-Esparcia, 2012) should be consolidated, which allow for greater linguistic and academic diversity and are able to ensure scientific quality outside the core group of countries (United States, United Kingdom, Netherlands and Germany). These indices should guarantee scientific quality while being permeable to Global South science and non-English speaking networks. At the same time, they should be cautious with an open science policy, as this can be prohibitive for certain countries.

2. Create research funding policies that allow for shared spaces (editorial boards, associations, universities), peer review circuits and academic legitimacy that are not exclusively dependent on Global North paradigms (as peer review is particularly restrictive for research in the Global South), and strengthen local journals that operate from the margins to build new signifiers.

3. Reflect critically on accreditation processes and work to design assessment systems for research activities that better align with academic and professional needs.

4. Affect the citation process to shape the academic legitimization mechanism. It is proposed to follow the recommendations of Freelon and colleagues (2023), which call, among other things, for a critical review of references at both individual and structural levels, prioritizing theoretical and geographical diversity and giving visibility to journals and publications working at the margins of academia.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

BERTRAN SALVADOR-MATA, Ph.D. in Communication, professor at the Universidad Pompeu Fabra, and coordinator of the Communication Futures Chair. He is a member of the board of directors of the Catalan Society of Communication (Institute of Catalan Studies) and the director of *Comunicació. Revista de Recerca i d'Anàlisi*. His research areas include the study of academic and scientific dynamics, the intersection between artificial intelligence and journalism, media structures, and news avoidance.

https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0499-0350