



Communication bibliometric research in Latin American scientific journals (2009-2018)

Investigación bibliométrica de comunicación en revistas científicas en América Latina (2009-2018)

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ABSTRACT

The objective of this article is to analyze the distinctive characteristics of research production in the field of communication in Latin American scientific communication journals. Meta-research is necessary because it allows re-evaluating the field and offers new horizons in knowledge production. Two studies were conducted: 1) Bibliometric analysis of 116 journals in eight databases and 24 publications in the Web of Science and Scopus; 2) Content analysis including that of 407 articles over a period of 10 years (2009–2018). The findings demonstrate a research trend in the Latin American region toward international standards, evidenced by a preponderance of empirical over essay studies. Universities in the region published most of the journals in the field and circulation was predominantly biannual. Contrary to expectations, the most widely disseminated topic was health communication, partly owing to a large sample of Brazilian journals. Within the empirical research, the qualitative approach was predominant. The interview was the most widely used research method in the region. Finally, the most used theories were agenda setting and framing. Imminent challenges arise, i.e., to strengthen indigenous theoretical production and to position the region's themes and reflection more decisively in knowledge production at a global level.

RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente artículo es analizar las características distintivas de la producción de investigación en el campo de la comunicación en las revistas científicas de comunicación latinoamericanas. La meta-investigación es necesaria, ya que permite reevaluar el campo y ofrecer nuevos horizontes en la producción de conocimientos. Se realizaron 2 estudios: 1) Análisis bibliométrico a 116 revistas presentes en ocho bases de datos, y luego a 24 publicaciones presentes en Web of Science y Scopus; 2) Análisis de contenido, que incluye el análisis de 407 artículos en un periodo de 10 años (2009-2018). Los hallazgos demostraron una tendencia en la investigación en Latinoamérica a los estándares internacionales, evidenciada en la preponderancia de los estudios empíricos sobre los ensayísticos. Las universidades de la región editan la mayoría de las revistas del campo y predomina la circulación semestral. Contrario a las expectativas, la temática más difundida fue comunicación en salud, en parte por la muestra amplia de revistas brasileñas. Dentro de la investigación empírica predomina de manera amplia el enfoque cualitativo. La entrevista es el método de investigación más usado en la región. Finalmente, las teorías más usadas en Latinoamérica fueron el establecimiento de la agenda y el enmarque. Surgen desafíos inminentes: fortalecer la producción teórica autóctona y posicionar la reflexión y las temáticas de la región de manera más decida en la producción de conocimiento en el concierto global.

KEYWORDS | PALABRAS CLAVE

Meta-research, communication, academic papers, Web of Science, Scopus, Latin America.
Metainvestigación, comunicación, artículos académicos, Web of Science, Scopus, América Latina.



1. Introduction

Meta-research has acquired great relevance in different disciplines, thanks to the possibility it offers scientists to "redesign science, identify areas that need to be re-examined, re-evaluate previous certainties, and point out new paths" for research (Evans & Foster, 2011: 721). Meta-analysis, meta-knowledge, or critical-reflective analysis in the field of communication (Fuentes-Navarro, 2019) already has a consolidated trajectory in an international context (Günther & Domahid, 2017; Rains et al., 2018). It is possible to find important historical (Löblich & Scheu, 2011), methodological (Scharkow, 2013), biographical (Meyen, 2012; Rogers, 1997), and thematic (Günther & Domahid, 2017) reviews, even on the same meta-analyses in the field (Rains et al., 2018). The production of knowledge in academic journals during this century is particularly interesting (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Demeter, 2017, 2018; Feeley, 2008; Kim et al., 2010; Walter et al., 2018).

In Spain, meta-research in communication from periodical publications has also achieved an extraordinary momentum (Fernández-Quijada & Masip-Masip, 2013; Goyanes et al., 2018; Martínez-Nicolás et al., 2019). In recent decades in Latin America, there has been incipient interest in the subject (Rogel-Salazar et al., 2017), although very specific studies that explore knowledge production in certain journals or countries have prevailed. Thus, we find studies related to knowledge production in Brazil (Krohling, 2009; Liberatore & Herrero-Solana, 2009; Pivatto-Brum et al., 2016), Mexico (Gómez-Rodríguez et al., 2017), Colombia (Arroyave-Cabrera et al., 2020; Gregorio-Chaviano, 2007) and Uruguay (Picco et al., 2014). A few have reviewed the presence of the region's journals in the major international databases (González-Pardo et al., 2020; Rogel-Salazar et al., 2017). However, there are no studies mapping knowledge production in the field, focusing on the main publications in the Latin American region. Meta-research is justified because it is necessary to identify new lines of research, "re-evaluate previous certainties and point out new paths" (Evans & Foster, 2011: 721), and, in this way, better understand the particularities of the field in Latin America. The objective of this article is to analyze the distinctive characteristics of research in the field of communication in Latin America from the main periodical publications. The following section reviews the regional research in the field to derive the major research questions.

2. State of the question: Previous empirical studies in Latin America

The representation of Latin American journals in large international databases is marginal. No journal is indexed in the SSCI (WoS) database and only 3.2% (14 of 434) are in Scopus (González-Pardo et al., 2020). Among the reasons given for this scarce representation are a lack of professionalization of the editors and the publishing body in general in the region and a scarcity of funds (Salager-Meyer, 2015). The publications maintain other dynamics related to the publishers of these journals and the periodicity of their circulation (Cetto & Alonso-Gamboa, 2011). Unlike the international context, neither publishers nor associations have had an important role in publishing journals in Latin America (Navas-Fernández, 2017). Regarding geographic distribution, the leading country is Brazil, publishing 35% of all journal titles, 2.5% worldwide (Navas-Fernández, 2017). Therefore, such editorial leadership is expected to extend to the field of communication. However, there remains a gap in the characterization of the periodicity and geographic distribution of journals in the field. The following research questions emerge from this review of previous studies:

- P.I. 1. In which databases are Latin American communication journals indexed?
- P.I. 2. What is the periodicity of circulation?
- P.I. 3. Who publishes existing communication journals in the region?
- P.I. 4. What is the geographic distribution of communication journals in the region?

Various reviews in Latin America have raised certain topics that have stood out in the field: alternative communication, communication policies, communicative imperialism, and cultural studies (Barranquero, 2011). Gobbi (2008) analyzed 1,576 papers presented at the annual conferences of the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIIC for its initials in Spanish) from 1998 to 2006, finding that the most common topics were reflection on the media, 12% on television and 9% on the Internet, and research theories and methods at 8%. It is striking that 57% of the papers could not be classified because

they were "so diluted" that it was impossible to do so. Moyano (2018) analyzed 672 papers presented from 2000 to 2010 in six ALAIC conferences and three meetings of the Latin American Federation of Social Communication Faculties (FELAFACS in Spanish), identifying the following predominant thematic categories: Communication and Media Processes (29%), Media, Technologies and Politics (21%), Media, Technology and Culture (18%), and Media, Technologies and Education (17%). Gómez-Rodríguez et al. (2017) reported that in the journal *Comunicación y Sociedad* (Communication and Society) in Mexico, four topics stood out: sociocultural environment (43.6%), academic (24.9%), socioeconomic (16.7%), and socio-political (14.8%). Although there was no homogeneity in the categories used in the studies, there was a gap in the topics addressed in the journals in the field for Latin America, so the following question was posed:

- Pl. 5. What themes will be more frequent in Latin America?

The most important antecedent in knowledge production research within research journals dates to the pioneering work of Orozco-Gómez (1997), who analyzed 10 journals published in Latin America on the celebration of the anniversary of the first school of journalism in the region (National University of La Plata, Argentina, 1934). One of the central conclusions of the study was that the essay, particularly the superficial (light), was the most widespread form for presenting research by academics in the region. At the end of the last century, the Mexican researcher emphasized the need for more empirical studies that would advance theory in Latin America.

The globalization of academia and institutional pressures to climb in international rankings have led researchers to adopt international standards and perform research with empirical evidence, more common in international publications (Alvesson et al., 2017; Goyanes, 2020). Murphy and Zhu (2012) reported a new neo-colonialism in the international academy that tends to impose standardization and empiricism as a widespread norm in scientific production. Goyanes et al. (2018) and Piñero-Naval and Morais (2019) showed a new trend in Spanish journals, which have gone from theoretical reflection to research based on empirical evidence. It is expected that a similar change may be occurring in the field in Latin America, based on which the question arises:

- Pl. 6. Will empirical studies prevail over essay studies?

McAnany and La-Pastina (1994) reviewed Latin American audience studies from a little over two decades (1970–1993). After analyzing 26 texts, they concluded that one of the major problems in most studies was their methodological deficiency; some texts did not even include a methodology section showing the procedures followed to arrive at their conclusions. The two most common methods found were the survey and ethnography. Moyano (2018: 313) stated that "7 of 10 works (68%) presented evidence of a methodology, but only 2 out of 10 (19%) contained explicit references to the application of methods, production techniques and/or research tools...or any other methodological by-product". In presentations that showed direct or indirect evidence of a methodology, 76% were qualitative, 9% quantitative, and 13% mixed. Whereas McAnany and La-Pastina (1994) reviewed studies that included master's and doctoral theses, Moyano focused on papers presented at ALAIC and FELAFACS over a decade (2000–2010). Therefore, it is of great interest to explore the methodological approaches in academic journals of the region.

- Pl. 7. What methodological approach and methods are the most common in the articles?

Various international studies have explored the most-used theories in research in the field of communication. After tracking 48 years of research in six leading journals in the field, Bryant and Miron (2004) established that the theory of framing, agenda setting, and cultivation analysis were the most used over nearly half a century. This finding was corroborated by Walter et al. (2018) in their investigation of all knowledge production in the *Journal of Communication*, from its creation in 1951 through 2016. Chung et al. (2013) agreed that the framing theory was the most used in the field, whereas Piñero-Naval and Morais (2019) concluded that framing, agenda setting, and uses and gratifications were the most frequent theories in Hispanic American journals. However, there are no studies that explore this topic in Latin American journals.

3. Material and method

To answer the first four research questions, variables were defined from which a bibliometric analysis was developed for all Latin American communication journals present in eight databases: Latindex, Dialnet, DOAJ, Scopus, AHCI, SSCI, REDIB, MIAR, ESCI and Google Scholar Metrics (GSM). Initially, 129 journals were identified. After several purification procedures according to validity, relevant subject areas, and the scope of journal contents, this number became $N=116$. Subsequently, 24 Latin American communication journals belonging to Web of Science and Scopus were selected. A decision was made to focus on the decade 2009–2018 (years for which the latest data were available for the coding procedure), as it is considered a sufficient period to identify the distinctive characteristics of the journals studied. The initial sample yielded 9,547 documents. Editorials, reviews and other texts that were not academic articles were excluded, which left a final sample of 5,660 articles. For the data extraction procedure, the methodological techniques were applied in two phases. In the first, information extracted from the metadata was characterized through a bibliometric analysis using the VOSviewer software (Van-Eck & Waltman, 2010). This enabled highlighting the study topics that were the most cited in scientific articles.

To identify the main topics in Latin American journals (P.I. 5), considering the results of the KW+ present in Scopus and ESCI, a clustering algorithm was applied in an integral way, with a resolution parameter ≥ 10 . This created 17 thematic groupings in which the degree of similarity of the KW+ was indicated, considering the communication sub-disciplines to which they belong, and which were proposed by Walter et al. (2018) and the thematic groups established by the Latin American Association of Communication Researchers (ALAIIC in Spanish). The most representative KWs were coded in terms of content area, and conceptual definitions of the sub-disciplines established in the codebook: 1) organizational, business and public relations communication; 2) Communication and human behavior; 3) Political communication and public opinion; 4) Communication and education; 6) Reception and media studies; 7) Popular communication, community, and citizenship; 8) Theory and methodology of communication research; 9) Communication, technology, and development; 10) Communication and sociocultural studies; 11) Communication for social change; 12) Communication in marketing and advertising scenarios; 13) Discourse and communication; 14) Studies of journalism; 15) Communication and history; 16) Ethics, freedom of expression, and right to communication; 17) Digital communication, networks, and processes. This thematic division has been adequately validated by the scientific community in Latin America over the more than four decades since the beginning of ALAIIC.

In the second phase, we conducted a quantitative content analysis (Riffe et al., 2014; Wimmer & Dominick, 2010). We developed a sampling plan to identify the articles and a codebook based on similar studies (Fernández-Quijada & Masip-Masip, 2013; Goyanes et al., 2018; Kim et al., 2010; Martínez-Nicolás et al., 2019; Saperas & Carrasco-Campos, 2018). We addressed variables such as the empirical or essay typologies of the articles, predominant methodological approach and research methods, and theories most used in Latin American journals. In the analysis of the theories in the articles, the variable was structured based on results of the theories most cited in the studies of Bryant and Miron (2004), Walter et al. (2018) and Piñeiro-Naval and Morais (2019), in which 16 theories were defined that were conceptualized from the most representative authors. For the article type variable, several definitions were considered (Raiche & Gaudreault, 2014, cited by Bermejo-Berros, 2014; Baiget & Torres-Salinas, 2013; Piñeiro-Naval & Morais, 2019), understanding empirical articles to be those characterized by the presentation of results derived from data collection via the application of some technique or instrument. Essays are those in which various purposes were distinguished, such as the definition of concepts or the identification of problems or unresolved research questions. Finally, there are review articles, which present a state of the art or study of the situation in an entire area or of a topic in which there is critical analysis of how much has been published about it.

Regarding sampling, methodological decisions were guided by previous paradigmatic studies as follows. Bryant and Miron (2004) selected three journals and analyzed one journal edition per year, for a total of 1,806 over 44 years (1956–2000). Walter et al. (2018) examined 1,574 articles from the Journal of Communication over 65 years. Similarly, Kim et al. (2010) analyzed the entire production of Health Communication articles over 22 years, including 642 texts. In their scientometric study on the use of

grey literature, Joachim and H el ene (2020) evaluated 10% of a sample of 700 articles. For the present study, given that most publications had a semi-annual or quarterly circulation, we selected two articles per year and per journal, covering most publications. The final sample consisted of 470 articles chosen randomly over 10 years. It is important to note that there were journals that did not report articles in some years: Austral Comunicaci n (2009–2011); Oficios Terrestres (2018); Revista Comunicaci n Midi tica (2009). For the coding process, three professionals were trained, all with communication background and two with postgraduate degrees. For the intercoder test, a random subsample of ~10% of the cases (n=47) was selected. The statistical parameter used to calculate reliability between the coders was Krippendorff's alpha (Krippendorff, 2011), found by using the "macro Kalpha" (Hayes & Krippendorff, 2007). Coding data were exported to SPSS (version 25) and the average reliability was found to be favorable: $M(\alpha_k)=0.90$, with values between 0.81 and 0.99.

4. Analysis and results

Regarding the first research question about the type of indexing of journals in Latin America (P.I. 1), Latindex was the database with the greatest presence in journals of the region (68), followed by Google Scholar (66), DOAJ (62), MIAR (37), Dialnet (28), ESCI (15), Redib (13), and Scopus (14) (Table 1). There were no Latin American journals indexed in SSCI (WoS); the Spanish Comunicar Journal and Profesional de la Informaci n were the only Spanish-language ones in that database.

Table 1. Number of journals per database and comparative analysis by communication collection and presence in Latin America

Database	Total collection	Communication collection	Percentage	Latin American collection	Percentage
SSCI	4,781	88	1.84	0	0
Scopus	43,317	434	1.00	14	3.2
ESCI	7,727	131	1.70	15	11.5
Latindex	32,745	457	1.40	68	14.9
DOAJ	14,903	234	1.57	62	26.5
MIAR	46,840	598	1.28	37	6.2
Dialnet	10,824	92	0.85	28	30.4
Redib	3,365	100	2.97	16	16

On the other hand, regarding the periodicity with which Latin American journals circulate (P.I. 2), semi-annual publications were predominant in the region (61%). Only GSM had two bimonthly publications. Scopus and ESCI had two quarterly publications. There was a trend for which the less demanding was their indexing, the longer their publication periods. This was the case of Latindex, GSM, DOAJ, MIAR and ESCI.

Regarding the editors of the main communication journals in the region (P.I. 3), most of the journals were from educational institutions (95), followed by universities (81.89%), associations (7.75%), and study centers (3.44%). Only the journal Cine Documental de Argentina was produced by a publishing house. Only four journals converged in the five databases: The Colombian Palabra Clave and Signo y Pensamiento, the Chilean Comunicaci n y Medios, and the Argentinian  tica y Cine. Regarding geographical distribution (P.I. 4), most publications were from Brazil (54.31%), surpassing second-place Argentina (14.65%) by 39.65%. Colombia (9.48%) and Chile (6%) held third and fourth places, respectively.

Table 2. Distribution by country of Latin American communication journals in scientific databases

	Latindex	GSM	DOAJ	MIAR	Dialnet	ESCI	REDIB	SCOPUS
Brazil	29	42	36	15	0	4	4	7
Argentina	16	5	7	4	6	4	2	0
Colombia	7	7	6	6	8	1	2	2
Chile	5	3	3	3	4	3	3	2
Ecuador	1	2	3	1	1	1	1	0
Venezuela	2	2	1	0	2	0	1	0
Mexico	1	2	1	3	1	0	0	1
Uruguay	2	1	2	2	2	1	1	0
Peru	3	2	3	3	4	1	2	1
Bolivia	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	68	66	62	37	28	15	16	13

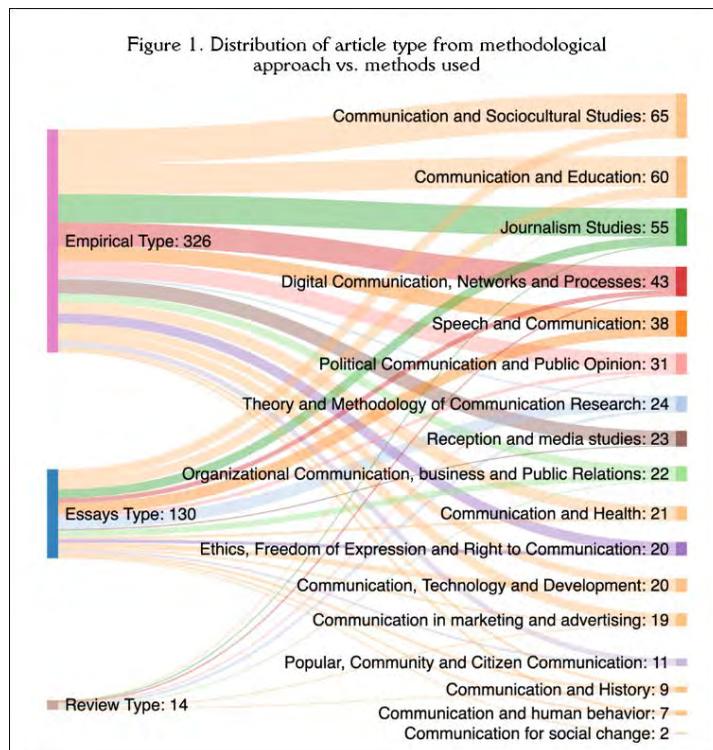
National, local, or institutional journals were predominant. Very few in the region had an international reach. The distribution by country in the eight databases (Table 2) shows Latindex with the greatest

coverage, followed by GSM, DOAJ, and MIAR. Brazil had the greatest presence in the databases. It was trailed at great distance by Argentina and Colombia. Bolivia had the least presence. In all the journals identified in ESCI, from which 1,482 documents were recovered, and in those of Scopus, with 3,016 documents, health communication was the main topic in the 106 KW+ (21.12%). In detail (Table 3), it is seen that three sub-areas of communication had the highest frequency (48.261%): health, sociocultural studies, and research theory and methodology. Areas related to marketing and advertising, history, and popular and citizen communication were the least frequent.

Table 3. KW+ ranking by communication subdiscipline

Subdiscipline	KW+	Frequency	Percentage
Communication and Health	106	1,412	21.12
Communication and Sociocultural Studies	83	1,214	16.53
Theory and Methodology of Communication Research	55	1,056	10.96
Digital Communication, Networks and Processes	42	666	8.37
Organizational and Business Communication, and Public Relations	39	467	7.77
Reception and Media Studies	35	652	6.97
Communication and Education	33	548	6.57
Political Communication and Public Opinion	22	157	4.38
Regional and Sectoral Studies	17	262	3.39
Communication and Human Behavior	17	137	3.39
Journalism Studies	13	274	2.59
Communication, Technology and Development	12	98	2.39
Speech and Communication	10	141	1.99
Ethics, Freedom of Expression and Right to Communication	10	128	1.99
Communication in Marketing and Advertising scenarios	4	42	0.80
Popular, Community and Citizen Communication	2	27	0.40
Communication and History	2	28	0.40

Regarding the type of prevalent articles (P.I. 6), upon exploring this variable in relation to the subdisciplines of communication (Figure 1), it was observed that most articles were empirical (52.15%), followed by essay (27.66%) and review (2.98%). Breaking down these data, 52.15% belonged to sociocultural studies (15.64%), education (13.50%), journalism (12.58%), and digital communication (10.43%).

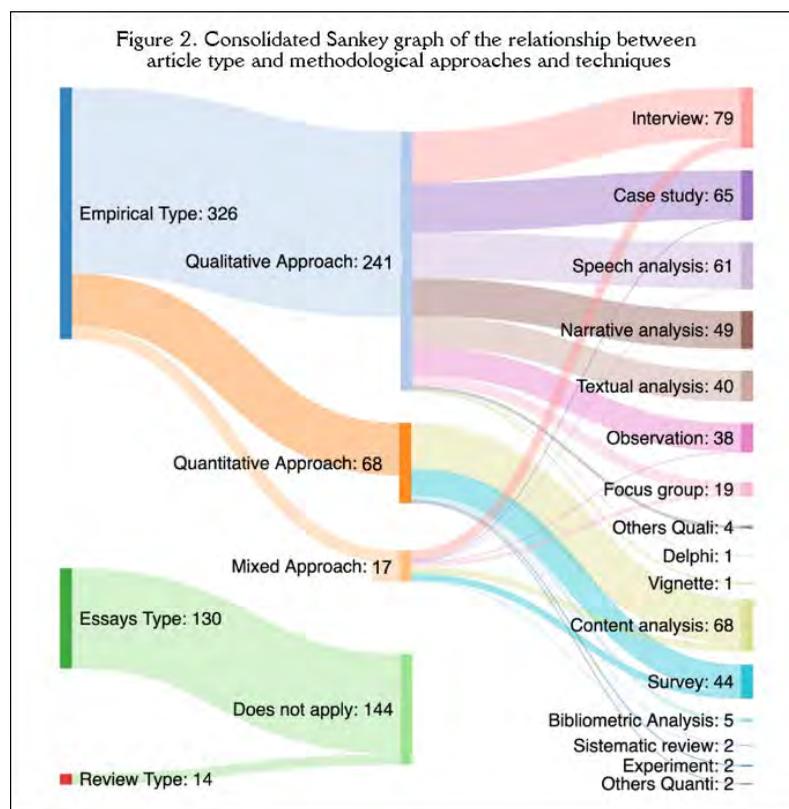


Analyzing in detail the sub-disciplines on which each type of article focused, the essay documents, present at 57.69%, addressed other areas such as the theory and methodology of communication research (13.08%), discourse (12.31%), education (11.54%), sociocultural studies (10.77%), and journalism (10%).

The subdiscipline of communication and sociocultural studies was the most addressed by empirical studies at 13.83%, closely followed by education (12.77%) and journalism (11.7%). These three subdisciplines made up 38.30% of the total. Below 10% were digital communication (9.15%), discourse (8.09%), political communication and public opinion (6.38%), and theory and methodology of communication research (5.11%). These four sub-disciplines constituted 28.94% of the total. The only subject area without empirical studies was communication for social change. The 14 review studies focused on eight of the 17 sub-disciplines: theory and methodology of communication research (28.57%); there was less representation by political communication and public opinion (with the same percentages of 14.29%), communication in marketing and advertising scenarios, and digital communication, networks, and processes.

The predominant methodological approach in the articles was another research question (P.I. 7). We found (Figure 2) that upon separately analyzing the empirical articles (326), 73.93% were qualitative (241), 20.86% quantitative (68), and 5.21% mixed (17). Likewise, 253 articles (77.61%) used a single research technique, 55 (16.87%) used two, 4.29% (14 articles) used three, and only 1.23% (4 articles) used four.

In terms of the seven most-used research techniques, which accounted for 85% of the total, 61.25% concentrated on five qualitative techniques and 23.33% on two quantitative techniques (Figure 2). The five qualitative techniques were the interview (16.46%), case study (13.82%), discourse analysis (12.71%), narrative analysis (10.21%), and textual analysis (8.51%). For the quantitative approach, the most-used technique was content analysis (14.46%) and survey (9.36%). It is striking that the experiment showed marginal use in the region (0.43%).

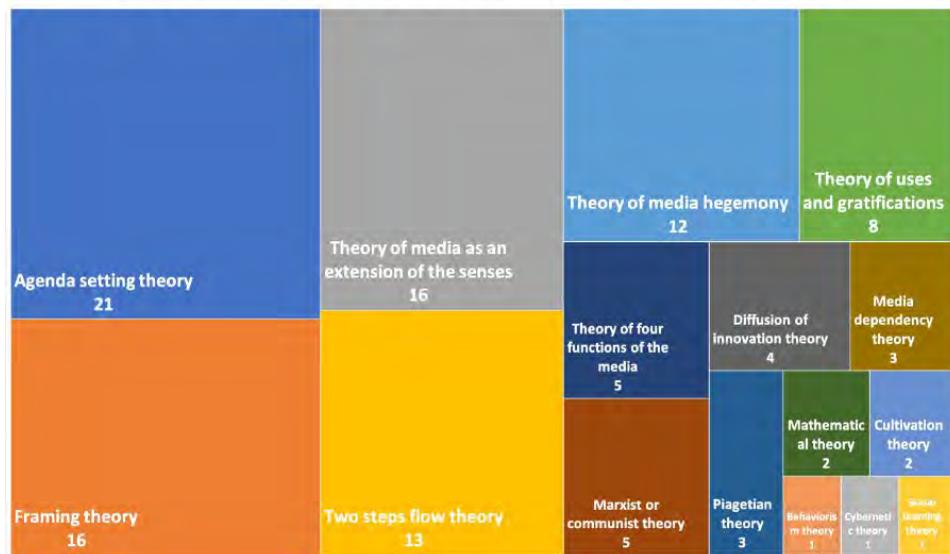


Finally, regarding the presence of theories in the articles (P.I. 9), the scarce use of theories in academic publications of the region is striking. Only 17.66% of the articles explicitly presented at least one theory.

In agreement with similar studies at the international level, the theory of agenda setting (18.54%) and framing (14.16%) were the most-used in the sample (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Piñero-Naval & Morais, 2019). McLuhan's theory of media (14.16%) ranked second as well. This popularity can be explained by its usefulness in the thematic area of digital communication, networks, and processes.

As evident from Figure 3, the other theories made up less than 10%, where it is seen that only the theories of uses and gratifications (7.08%) and that of the four functions of the media and the Marxist (each with 4.42%) exceeded 4% of the entire sample. This allows us to observe that in all 83 articles with at least one theory, reflections were exclusively concentrated in six and represented 76.11% of the entire sample.

Figure 3. Theories present in articles of Latin American communication journals



5. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of the present work was to analyze knowledge production in the field of communication in Latin America from academic publications. The most important finding is the identification of a research trend that is close to international standards. We have gone from an approach characterized by theoretical-argumentative disquisitions of essay type (Orozco-Gómez, 1997) to an empirical approach, in which the methodological aspect is essential to arrive at conclusions based on evidence. More than half the articles published in the 24 journals in the field (52.15%) were characterized by an empirical approach, compared to 27.66% that had an essay approach. As recently reported by Goyanes et al. (2018) and Piñero and Morais (2019) in Spain and Latin America, the globalization of research is advancing, and academics in the region have adopted an approach more in accord with the international context.

However, far from celebrating this state of affairs, the thought arises as to whether said change is not motivated by the institutional pressure of many universities to appear in or climb positions in the major international rankings. One of the key indicators of this process is the number of citations and publications in the hegemonic databases (WoS/Scopus). Barranquero (2011) had already highlighted that one of the strengths of the "Latin Americanism of communication" was a questioning of the functionalist and empiricist informational model and the search for a participatory paradigm, as well as a strong commitment to a social reality that privileges aspects such as alternative, popular and pro-social communication, aspects close to the local context. Marques-de-Melo (1999) emphasized as distinctive the theoretical hybridism product of the interweaving of European, Meso-South American (pre and post-colonial) and African traditions, which has become a unique mestizo research in the region. By assuming international standards, many researchers from the Global South (GS) are pressured to abandon their own indigenous epistemologies

and methodological approaches, or even topics closer to the local context, which do not always fit in publications in the international context (Demeter, 2018). Another important finding was the limited use of theories in academic articles. Fewer than one in five articles cited a theory. This finding is consistent with various international studies (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Piñeiro & Morais, 2019; Walter et al., 2018). This recurrent finding arouses interest in future studies on the use of theory in research within the field of communication. Although one of the purposes of science is to produce theories, it seems that this is a long road filled with many approaches, before advancing solid constructs with some universal validity.

Another issue in the region that deserves deep reflection is the use of communication theories. Those that were the most used are also the most popular reported in international studies of the same topic (Bryant & Miron, 2004; Potter et al., 2014; Walter et al., 2018). The most used included agenda setting, framing, and the theory of media as an extension of the senses. This finding corroborates the idea that the region's researchers have embraced the globalization of research. However, none of these theories had Latin America or a country in the GS as its author or geographic focus. This finding reaffirms the theory of academic dependency according to which the Global North (GN) and the periphery coexist in the same research ecosystem. However, by possessing cultural, symbolic, and material resources, the GN maintains its sovereignty as a producer of knowledge. Demeter (2018) noted that in 42 years of journals in the field indexed in WoS, South America contributed only 1%. It is therefore essential that the wide-ranging discussion that has taken place in the region within the field of communication be more noticeable and enter the great international conversation from a horizontal dialogical perspective.

The data analyzed herein confirm that the qualitative approach is preferred in the region. The interview, case study, and discourse analysis were the qualitative research methods most used by academics. This reaffirms the long humanistic tradition closest to the qualitative approach that has been present in the social sciences. However, content analysis was the second most-used method, and the survey occupied sixth place. It is striking that the experimental method, which was the most used in the *Journal of Communication*, a journal considered central to the field, was used very infrequently in the region. Later studies could explore the reasons for this lack of use. The finding that the most frequent subfield or topic was communication and health was surprising. This subfield has a recent history in the region, although it has been consolidating in the last decade, led by the knowledge production that has occurred in Brazil (Soares-de-Araujo & Cuberli, 2020). It is likely that the large sample of journals from Brazil had an influence on this result. The following themes were predictable if we consider that there has been a very valuable reflection on sociocultural aspects in the region, led by authors such as Jesús Martín-Barbero, Néstor García Canclini and Beatriz Sarlo, among others (De-Moragas-Spà, 2011). Likewise, reflection on theory and methodology has been provided by great reflections fostered by authors such as Pasquali, Verón, Beltrán, Marques de Melo, Fuentes Navarro, Galindo, and Vidales.

The present study is not without its limitations. The large sample of Brazilian journals influenced some results, although it corresponds to the bibliographic production of the region. Some journals studied were not published for some years, affecting the entire sample. Subsequent studies should be able to analyze knowledge production by expanding the sample and longitudinal study that allows observing changes and trends over time. The present research contributes to the theoretical body of knowledge production in the field of communication in Latin America. It explores in an original way and with empirical rigor variables that had not been previously studied in regional academic journals. Likewise, as suggested by Evans and Foster (2011), it points to clues about the specific challenges that communication research must tackle. Making theorizing and reflection in the region more visible is undoubtedly one of the essential challenges. so that the voice is heard more clearly in the great conversation in both the institutional spaces of the major associations and conferences and the journals of the hegemonic publishers in the field.

Author Contribution

Idea, J.A.A.C.; Literature review (state of the art), J.A.A.C., R.G.P.; Methodology, J.A.A.C., R.G.P.; Data analysis, R.G.P.; Results, R.G.P.; Discussion and conclusions, J.A.A.C., R.G.P.; Writing (original draft), J.A.A.C., R.G.P.; Final revisions, J.A.A.C., R.G.P.; Project design and sponsorship, J.A.A.C., R.G.P.

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