

# Communication Research in Spain (1985-2015). Institutional Context, Academic Community and Scientific Production

La investigación sobre comunicación en España (1985-2015).  
Contexto institucional, comunidad académica y producción  
científica

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## ABSTRACT

The institutional framework supporting Spanish Communication research has changed radically over the past 30 years, affecting the internal structure of the academic community and the characteristics of scientific production in this field. This paper reconstructs that process by attending to four factors: the increase since the early 1990s in universities offering Communication studies; the establishment of three distinct Communication degree programmes (1991); the deployment and consolidation of a *culture of evaluation* of research activity (1989-2008); and the recognition of Communication as a specific area in the National RD&I Plan (2010). Such institutional changes have had a significant impact on the structure of the scientific community (exponential growth, incorporation of women, growing internationalisation, etc.) and the general direction of scientific production (publication formats, collaborative research, methodological quality, etc.). The various identified indicators showed a turning point in Spanish Communication research in the mid-2000s, situating it within parameters that differed considerably from those of the previous period.

**KEYWORDS:** communication research; Spain; institutional framework; scientific community; scientific production.

## RESUMEN

En los últimos 30 años se ha producido una radical transformación del entramado institucional en que se apoya la investigación española sobre comunicación, afectando a la estructura interna de la comunidad académica y a las características de la producción científica en este campo. En este

trabajo se reconstruye ese proceso atendiendo a cuatro factores: el incremento de la oferta universitaria de estudios de comunicación desde comienzos de los 90; el establecimiento de tres licenciaturas diferenciadas (1991); el despliegue y afianzamiento de una *cultura de la evaluación* de la actividad investigadora (1989-2008); y el reconocimiento de Comunicación como área específica en el Plan Estatal de I+D+i (2010). Estos cambios institucionales han tenido un impacto apreciable en la estructura de la comunidad científica (crecimiento exponencial, incorporación de las mujeres, creciente internacionalización, etc.) y en la orientación de la producción científica (formatos de publicación, investigación colaborativa, calidad metodológica, etc.). Los diversos indicadores identificados señalan que mediada la primera década de los 2000 se produce un punto de inflexión que sitúa a la investigación comunicativa en España en unos parámetros sensiblemente distintos a los del periodo precedente.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** investigación sobre comunicación; España; contexto institucional; comunidad científica; producción científica.

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## 1. Introduction

It could be said that Spanish Communication research a decade ago was not especially prodigious when it came to taking Communication research itself as an object of study and to reflecting on the knowledge interests and epistemological orientations thereof, or on the results obtained therefrom (Martínez Nicolás, 2008). Since then, however, efforts made in this sphere have begun to put us in an optimal position – or at least a more reliable one than before – to reconstruct paths and propose diagnoses of the historical evolution of Communication research in Spain. Back then, we had a number of valuable contributions on this issue, from the pioneering works of Moragas (1981) and Gifreu (1988 and 1989) on the history of the field of Communication, to the subsequent contributions by Jones in the 1990s and early 2000s (Jones, 1994, 1997, 1998a and 2000). However, it has only been in the past ten years, since the mid-2000s, that interest in what we now call *meta-research* has taken hold with an intensity that is probably without parallel in other disciplines in Spain, or indeed to what is happening in other countries with similar scientific cultures.

Focusing mainly on academic production in specialised journals, and to a lesser extent on doctoral theses, the effort put into this task of recognition should not lead to complacency because certain weaknesses and limitations that we noted 10 years ago continue to exist. To begin with, works aimed at the *critique* of research are still few and far between. Such works should necessarily be limited to a

particular specialised domain (a particular sub-discipline or an object of study, a theory, a methodological perspective, etc.) to ensure that the validity, thoroughness, novelty or originality of our contributions can be properly assessed. Along these lines, the collection of essays on Communication research in Catalonia, edited by Berrio, remains an essential work of reference. Since it was published more than 20 years ago, there has hardly been any follow-on work (Berrio, 1997). Lacking this somewhat more sophisticated *critical* orientation, the recent rise in Communication *meta-research* in Spain seems to be too concerned with bibliometrics and content analysis of more or less stringent samples. Generally in the form of scientific articles or conference presentations, such research only scratches the surface or shows the most superficial trends, if you will, of the research we are actually conducting.

Furthermore, and in a fairly generalised way, such *meta-research* usually falls into the trap of mere *descriptivism*. Consequently, it provides us with a certain representation of the *state of research* (objects of study, methods, techniques, authorship regimes, epistemic networks, contributing universities, etc.), but it does not manage to explain why research is actually *in that state*, thus overlooking a variety of different factors (socio-historical, institutional, epistemological, science policy-related, etc.) that have an impact on it at any given time. With its scope and explanatory power curtailed, the capacity of *meta-research* to serve as a stimulus for research practice is diminished. Indeed, this is contrary to the expectation that research practice should identify the shortcomings of *meta-research*, suggest new ways to develop it and elucidate the determining factors thereof. Furthermore, such practice can only be carried out inasmuch as it is formulated as a *critique of knowledge* and approached from the *sociology of science* perspective, which addresses the social, historical and institutional contexts within which scientific activity inevitably falls (Kuhn, 1962; Merton; 1973; Bourdieu, 1984 and 2001).

Be that as it may, the vast amount of empirical evidence gathered in the past decade puts us, as we said, in an optimal position to give an overview of the evolution of Communication research in Spain over the past 25 or 30 years. It enables us to make headway towards reconstructing a general history of the field by building on the works by Moragas (1981) and Gifreu (1989). And that overview not only shows that the institutional framework supporting Communication research in Spain has changed radically over the past three decades (Martínez Nicolás, 2008; Saperas, 2016), but also that the process has affected the structure and practices of the academic community, and particularly the characteristics and general direction of scientific production in this sphere. Successive provisions relating to general science policy in Spain have undoubtedly played a decisive role in bringing about such change. Strengthening the *culture of evaluation* has especially done so, since it led to the creation of Spain's National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA, as abbreviated in Spanish) in 2002, and to the implementation of the *Academia* programme for university teaching staff accreditation in 2008. Indeed, their role has been so decisive that, as we shall endeavour to demonstrate in this work, the various indicators available to us on the evolution of Spanish Communication research over the past 30 years show that there was a turning point in the mid-2000s, a time when this disciplinary field seemed to enter a new phase characterised by a *scientific culture* that was very different from the previous one.

However, the factors explaining that *step change* go beyond the often mentioned “ANECA effect” (Soriano, 2008). While useful for fostering reflection on the field – to the extent that the take-off of Communication *meta-research* in Spain can be considered driven by that “effect” – it has ended up becoming a kind of *flatus vocis* used to expeditiously get rid of references to the “context” within which Communication research in Spain has been conducted over the past decade. Without denying its relevance, the impact of State policy decisions condensed in that “ANECA effect” does not consider the array of factors determining scientific activity in this sphere, not even in the past 10

years. Moreover, it remains to be ascertained, in detail and with adequate empirical support, in what sense an “effect” – one that had often become the source of many of the “defects” afflicting Spanish Communication research – would have been felt. Although we now have some works that address this issue (Masip, 2011; Goyanes, 2015 and 2017; Lacasa, 2017; Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2017; Soriano, 2017), the systematic review of the available evidence that we propose in this work may help to reconstruct the complexity of the Communication *research system* in Spain over the past 30 years. This necessarily requires us to address the interaction between the institutional context, the structure and practices of the academic community, and scientific production in that period.

## 2. Institutional changes affecting Communication research

The institutionalisation of Communication research in Spain began with the creation of Information Sciences faculties at the Complutense University of Madrid and the Autonomous University of Barcelona in 1971. A few months later, in April 1972, Journalism studies taught at the University of Navarra – governed by the Catholic Prelature Opus Dei – were recognised at university level (Decrees 2478/1971 and 891/1972, respectively). This process culminated in the creation of the faculty of Information Sciences at the University of the Basque Country in October 1981 (Royal Decree 2344/1981). Communication Studies were then organised into a single degree in Information Sciences, with three branches or specialisations in Journalism, Audio and Visual Image Sciences, and Advertising (Decree 2478/1971). The *sectoral* structure adhered to in order to train Communication professionals at the former Official Schools (of Journalism, Radio and Television, Cinematography, and Advertising) was transferred to the university sphere and, as a consequence of the new faculties taking on their functions, those Schools gradually became defunct. But, unlike them, those new faculties constituted an *institutional framework* conducive to starting to forge a scientific tradition of Communication research in Spain. This was so because, among other reasons, they generated a *structure of opportunity* for *academic professionalisation*, whose mechanisms of access to and promotion during an academic career (doctoral theses, competitions to fill vacancies, etc.) required a decisive commitment to scientific activity (Martínez Nicolás, 2008). However, those access and promotion mechanisms were still too lax, and they were often dependent on struggles between groups of academics to form clientelist networks instead of on the strict application of meritocratic criteria. While certain aspects of such inertia persisted – and still persist today – the fact is that the institutional context within which Communication research in Spain was conducted from the mid-1980s was substantially undermined as a result.

### 2.1. Increase in the number of universities offering Communication studies

The pace of the institutionalisation process that began in the 1970s became more intense from the 1990s, with the *boom* in Communication studies in Spain. In the mid-1980s, the four faculties in existence at that time together had 5,000 students and around 500 lecturers. No more than 10 years later, those figures had quadrupled. By that time, 20 universities had begun to offer such studies, and between them they had 20,000 students and some 2,000 lecturers (Jones, 1998a). That expansion in offerings continued to grow exponentially. A decade later, in the mid-2000s, 44 universities offered such degrees and there were around 3,000 lecturers (ANECA, 2005; Abuín, 2010). The most reliable calculations for the recent period have estimated that, in 2015, there were 54 Spanish universities offering Communication programmes, on which there were 45,000 students being taught by some 4,500 lecturers (Saperas, 2016). Thus, regardless of the reference parameter taken – universities, students or lecturers – the data show that the *institutional volume* of Communication studies in Spain has multiplied tenfold over the past three decades.

Possible reasons for this inflationary process are the attractiveness of Communication-related professions and the large demand for such professionals generated by the radical transformation of the Spanish Communication system in this period. In the 1980s, the lifting of the iron-grip control exerted until then by the Francoist dictatorship, and Spain's political alignment with Western democracies – sanctioned by its accession to the European Union in 1986 – favoured the liberalisation and professionalisation of the sector (press, radio and film in particular). That push to liberalise and professionalise the sector continued until the early 1990s, when the public television monopoly was broken up and private television outlets began operating in Spain, thus fostering growth in the Audiovisual and Advertising markets. The expansion and dynamism of the Communication system has begun to drop off in recent years as a result of the advent of the *digital revolution* in the early 2000s. That revolution is at the very heart of the profound social, political, economic and cultural changes that advanced contemporary societies are experiencing.

Driven by a variety of circumstances at any given time, but always in an expansive direction, Communication studies have gradually taken root among the university education options with the highest demand and greatest potential for employment in Spain in the past 30 years. The exponential multiplication of offerings in this period may therefore have been due, to a large extent, to the decisive incorporation of newly created private universities into this educational sphere (Moragas, 2005). Such universities accounted for a third (19 out of 54) of the registered Spanish centres offering Communication degrees in 2015 (Saperas, 2016, p. 37). In that same year, there were 34 registered private universities in Spain (Simancas & García López, 2016, p. 181). Consequently, nearly 60% of those universities offered Communication degrees, thus giving a clear indication of the attractiveness that such studies have gained in private higher education offerings in the past 15 to 20 years.

## 2.2. Establishment of distinct Communication degrees

In the early 1990s, the old-style *Degree in Communication Sciences*, with mentions of specialisation in Journalism, Audio and Visual Image Sciences, or Advertising was split into three distinct degrees in *Advertising and Public Relations*, *Audiovisual Communication*, and *Journalism* (Royal Decrees 1386/1991, 1427/1991 and 1428/1991, respectively), with curricula that had also been updated. This option had probably been prefigured in the decision to segment the disciplinary field of Communication into two distinct “knowledge areas”: “Journalism” and “Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising”. That decision was set out in the provisions emanating from Spain's University Reform Law (1983) to regulate access to university teaching staff faculties (Royal Decree 1888/1984) and, consequently, the most specific nucleus of teaching staff in Communication Sciences faculties compulsorily came under one of those two areas from then on. And, after the 1991 reform, the term *Communication Sciences* became generalised.

Be that as it may, the fact is that the impact that the establishment of distinct degrees would have on the Communication research system in Spain over the following quarter century might not have been assessed properly. Even after the implementation of the three specialisations, the first faculties of Information Sciences – a label that had already become highly significant – were centres whose basic aim was to train journalists, thus generating a scientific community whose attention was focused on that media sphere. Furthermore, this was happening shortly after Franco's death, the demise of his dictatorship, and Spain's transition towards democracy, when renewed value was placed on the social role of Journalism and the Media, hence the interest in and urgency of their analysis (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2017).

In this respect, it was symptomatic that, when it came to segmenting the disciplinary field into “knowledge areas”, a decision was taken to single out “Journalism” and group “the rest” into a

second area. By doing so, it highlighted the somewhat subsidiary position that the spheres of Advertising and Audiovisual Communication occupied in the *academic mindset* at that time. And that is without taking Public Relations into account, which had been officially missing until the 1991 degree reform. The implementation of distinct degrees had the *symbolic significance* of putting the field's various specialisations on an equal footing in terms of institutional recognition, hence the replacement of the name *Information Sciences* with *Communication Sciences* in faculties from that moment on. The immediate *academic effect* of that decision was to strengthen university professionalisation and scientific activity in certain *specialised niche areas* (Advertising, Public Relations and Audiovisual Communication), which had been overlooked by Spanish Communication research until then.

### 2.3. Deployment and consolidation of a *culture of evaluation*

The impetus to modernise, embodied in the University Reform Law passed in August 1983 (Organic Law 11/1983), was aimed mainly and decisively at dragging Spanish universities out of the long-standing state of scientific anaemia that had hampered Spain's ability to take its place among advanced industrialised societies. The preamble was very clear in this respect: "Even if it were only to boost development, mentality and the scientific spirit in Spain, university reform would be justified." And that was the *leitmotiv* of the University Reform Law.

The measures proposed with that objective in mind included, among other provisions, a rearrangement of university structures, with the creation of departments, unto which it entrusted the organisation and coordination of scientific and teaching activities (Article 8); the reform of doctoral programmes, which should be aimed at "student specialisation and training in research techniques" (Article 31); and, in particular, the requirement that teaching staff should be subject to "an evaluation of teaching and scientific performance", which would be taken into consideration in competitions to access tenured teaching staff faculties (Article 45). This was the starting point for a *culture of evaluation* of research activity that, later on, would revolve around the concept of *scientific productivity*, whose assessment criteria would have a significant impact on the general direction of scientific research in Spain from that moment on. In the development of that *culture of evaluation*, at least three stages can be distinguished: implementation (1983-1989), strengthening (2001) and generalisation (2008). It has evolved in a way that not only makes the criteria tougher and the thoroughness of their application stricter, but also and mainly it has made *scientific performance* a determining factor for access to, consolidation of and promotion during the researchers' professional careers.

In the implementation stage, it was characteristic to consider *scientific performance* as a mere *incentive* to conduct research. In fact, that notion began to circulate as a consequence of a seemingly minor provision in terms of scientific policy about teaching staff's pay (Royal Decree 1086/1989). That provision established the *six-year rewards*, which are well-known among Spanish academics. Interested parties have to apply for them voluntarily, and the body in charge of granting them was a newly created one: Spain's National Commission for the Evaluation of Research Activity (CNEAI, as abbreviated in Spanish). That state of affairs continued throughout the 1990s and until the Law replacing the University Reform Law was passed in December 2001. The new one, the Organic Law on Universities (Organic Law 6/2001), was a veritable turning point for the consolidation of that *culture of evaluation* in Spain.

Indeed, Title IX of the Organic Law on Universities established two ways to access the many categories of university teaching staff positions, one reserved for tenured teaching staff faculties (professors and senior lecturers) through a system of "national habilitation" that entitles them to take

part in access competitions; and another for academically more demanding categories of non-tenured teaching staff (assistant doctor/lecturers and contracted doctor/lecturers). Imposed on the latter is an obligation to have obtained a positive evaluation of previous, “primarily research” activity in the case of contracted doctor/lecturers (Article 52) from another newly created body: Spain’s National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA, as abbreviated in Spanish). That body was formally constituted in July 2002, when, alongside regional agencies created afterwards, it began to carry out the functions conferred on it by the Organic Law on Universities.

The novel feature introduced by the Organic Law on Universities was, therefore, that *scientific performance* was no longer an *incentive* but instead an inescapable *requirement* for developing an academic career, thus reinforcing the *culture of evaluation* implemented a decade earlier. And, from April 2007, those conditions were immediately generalised across the teaching staff community by the Organic Law Modifying the Organic Law on Universities (Organic Law 4/2007), which also extended the requirement for prior accreditation exclusively by ANECA to tenured university teaching staff faculties ANECA (Modification of Article 57 of the Organic Law on Universities). In January 2008, little more than half a year later, ANECA implemented the *Academia* programme for university teaching staff accreditation, which made “research activity” a core criterion for obtaining the positive assessment required to be able to get access to and professional promotion at Spanish universities. Thus, for example, out of a maximum of 100, the minimum score for accreditation as a Tenured Senior Lecturer was set at 65 points, 35 of which (nearly 54%) had to correspond to the research merits provided, and the remainder to teaching activity and university management.

The cornerstone of the deployment of this *culture of evaluation*, and the undeniable cause of numerous objections from the sphere of Social Sciences (Jiménez, De Moya & Delgado, 2003; Perceval & Fornieles, 2008; Soriano, 2008; Ruiz Pérez, Delgado & Jiménez, 2010; Quirós, 2016; Soriano, 2017), was the definition, by the bodies in charge of implementing it, of what should be understood as “research activity” and, above all, of what the most suitable criteria for assessing the quality of a scientific track record should be. For the purpose of granting *six-year rewards*, CNEAI was charged with that task. From the outset, it decided to establish “quantifiable and verifiable criteria” in order to increase “scientific productivity” so that it could be “detected in critical international databases”, in the words of Ana Crespo, the Commission’s general coordinator from 2005 to 2008 (cited in Soriano, 2008). And that approach was adopted nigh on unequivocally by ANECA in the procedures for teaching staff accreditation.

CNEAI’s relentless job of refining what counted as “research activity”, as well as the quality standards attached to it, was reconstructed in detail up to 2009 by Ruiz Pérez, Delgado and Jiménez (2010). And, revised to the current time, it reveals a kind of pendulum movement of *tightening and loosening* in their approach. Currently, it is in a tightening phase. In short, the most significant milestones in this process were the practical reduction of scientific activity to “publications” at the expense of any other type of research product or task (conference presentations, report elaboration, doctoral theses supervision, project or research group management, etc.); and, above all, the preference given to articles published in academic journals. Indeed, the journals’ *impact factor* was introduced as a quality criterion in 1996, with an explicit mention of those included in the *Journal Citation Reports* (JCR), a citation index managed by a company dedicated to the publishing business. That decision had an immediate effect on the sphere of Social Sciences because, as highlighted by Ruiz Pérez, Delgado and Jiménez (2010, p. 906), “when the criteria for ‘hard sciences’ are applied to some extent to ‘other forms of knowledge’, the success rates [in the evaluation of research activity] fall considerably”. Thus, between 1989 and 2004, only 59% of the *six-year rewards* applied for in the Social Sciences field were granted, the lowest alongside Economic and Business Sciences. In the 2005-2008 period, CNEAI’s successive provisions sought to “soften the previously pronounced JCR-

centrism” (Ruiz Pérez, Delgado & Jiménez, 2010, p. 907) by recognising other Spanish and international indices as being indicative of the quality of scientific journals (Scopus, Latindex, INRECS, DICE-CINDOC, etc.). But, for Social Sciences, such “softening” ended with the 2016 call for *six-year rewards* applications. Whereas the 2015 call stated that publications in JCR journals (point 3a), Scopus journals (point 3b) and other journals at the assessors’ discretion (point 3c) would be rated more highly, the 2016 call reinstated the privileged status of JCR; journals in high positions in Scopus would be accepted “without them necessarily being rated equally”; and, lastly, it stated that the remainder “could also be rated, though never in the same way”. The language used by CNEAI was certainly and surprisingly expeditious, once again shifting the pendulum to the “tightening” position.

As we said, ANECA nigh on unequivocally adopted the criteria that CNEAI had established for university teaching staff accreditation, and even followed the latter’s pendulum movement. Implemented in 2008, the evaluation of research activity within the framework of the *Academia* programme gave precedence to publications in indexed journals, described generically as “catalogues like the *Journal Citation Reports* or equivalent”. Such laxity began to be redressed with the provisions specifying the new procedure for university accreditation approved in 2015 (Royal Decree 415/2015), which, for the field of Social Sciences, ordered scientific journals into four levels, starting with those in the first and second quartiles of JCR and the first quartile of Scopus. The provisions also required a minimum number of published works in these to obtain a positive assessment (for example, for the Tenured Senior Lecturer category, 10 articles in the first level to attain the highest grade (A), and four to obtain the minimum grade (B) actually required). As a result of the academic community’s response, the accreditation system had become practically paralysed until those criteria were reviewed, but it resumed in 2017 with new indications about the evaluable merits<sup>1</sup>, which continued along the same lines as before, that is, of strongly rewarding scientific activity giving rise to articles in journals included in the international *rankings* calculated by taking into account their *impact factor* (i.e., the number of citations of the articles they publish).

With the new tools at their disposal for independently disseminating their works in the web environment, a researcher’s prestige might potentially depend less and less on the journals in which her or his work is published, and more on her or his own “digital reputation” (Delgado, 2017). Be that as it may, the assessment of scientific activity quality seems forever doomed to be dependent on *rankings*, citations and followers. We may be measuring their “impact”, but we are certainly not appreciating their quality or influence: there are no algorithms for that<sup>2</sup>. In sum, the deployment of a *culture of evaluation* based on performance and productivity parameters thus defined ended up determining, and more forcefully from a decade ago, the general system of scientific research in Spain, and it obviously affected the disciplinary field of Communication too.

#### 2.4. Recognition of Communication in the National RD&I Plan

The act of boosting “mentality and the scientific spirit in Spain”, which served as a catalyst for the 1983 university reform, began to be firmed up with the passing of the Promotion and General Coordination of Scientific and Technical Research Law in 1986 (Law 13/1986). Known as the *Science Law* since then, it not only corroborated the long-standing backwardness of scientific activity in Spain, but also diagnosed the woes that beset it, with a number of remedies being proposed. The presentation of motives for the Law was also very clear in this respect, thus maintaining the drive

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<sup>1</sup> Documents available at <http://www.aneca.es/Programas-de-evaluacion/ACADEMIA>: “Criterios de evaluación [NOVIEMBRE 2016]” and “Criterios de evaluación [NOVIEMBRE 2017]”.

<sup>2</sup> Moreover, there may well be perfectly viable alternatives. In this respect, see Ibarra, Castro & Barrenechea, 2006; and Valero, Jiménez García & Coca, 2013.



that was characteristic of legislation in this field at that time, it stated: “In Spain, scientific research and technological development have traditionally taken place in a climate of atony and lack of social stimuli, [and] absence of instruments to guarantee the public authorities’ effective intervention in the programming and coordination of the scarce resources available [...]. It is not surprising, therefore, that the Spanish contribution to scientific and technological progress has generally been scant and unfitting of the place corresponding to us in other areas”. To rectify that situation, and among other provisions, the Law provided the Spanish scientific system with an instrument: the National Plan for Scientific Research and Technological Development. That plan proved fundamental to sustaining an active policy for stimulating research activity in Spain.

The National Plan is organised into specific programmes covering the various spheres of the science and technology system (researcher training, mobility and integration, infrastructures, projects, institutional strengthening, etc.) in successive four-year plans, from the period 1988-1991 to 2017-2020<sup>3</sup>. Of these programmes, the ones with the most decisive and sustained impact on scientific activity are probably those aimed at research project funding, on which the development of researchers’ ordinary work under more or less optimal conditions has depended considerably since then. After several restructuring efforts, the management of such projects has ended up being organised by large departments (Humanities and Social Sciences, Life Sciences, Environment and Natural Resources, etc.) that include the different areas and sub-areas of knowledge<sup>4</sup>. A characteristic of such management was, however, that the funding of projects submitted to annual competitive calls for applications would be resolved by a strict system of peer evaluation, in which the different panels of experts ruled on the quality of the projects and the amount of funding needed to carry them out in a maximum period of three or four years.

The sphere of Communication’s position in that organisational structure was certainly precarious over the more than 20 years between the first and sixth National Plans, in which the project applications generally targeted one of the sub-areas of knowledge in the field of Social Sciences. Those sub-areas were usually Sociology and Political Science, hence the identification codes SOCI and CPOL (as abbreviated in Spanish) applied to those that were successful in 2010. These were consequently assessed by experts in those sub-areas. That generated a more or less justified sense of grievance among researchers assigned to Communication faculties, who complained that the relatively little success of their proposals was due to the fact that the people assessing the projects in this sphere were not “specialists in Communication”. A sense of grievance, we insist, that was more or less justified because it may also have been the case that those “Communication” projects did not reach the required level of quality due to their inherent shortcomings (Martínez Nicolás, 2008). Whatever the case may be, after persistent and ultimately successful demands by the scientific community, that issue of Communication’s *precariousness* began to be rectified from the 2010 call

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<sup>3</sup> Since its implementation, there have been eight successive four-year plans: 1988-1991, 1992-1995, 1996-1999, 2000-2003, 2004-2007, 2008-2011, 2013-2016 and 2017-2020. National Plan for Scientific Research and Technological Development (National R&D Plan) was the original title established under the Science Law, which was changed to National Plan for Scientific Research, Development and Technological Innovation (National RD&I Plan) from the fourth plan drawn up for the 2000-2003 period. After the Science, Technology and Innovation Law had been passed in 2011 (Law 14/2011), which replaced the previous one dating from 1986, the State Plan for Scientific and Technical Research and Innovation (the current State RD&I Plan) was established, whose first four-plan corresponded to the 2013-2016 period. The replacement of the previous National Plan with the current State Plan to bring it into conformity with the 2011 Science Law meant that the 2012 call for applications was still governed by the provisions of the sixth plan (2008-2011). The State Research Agency provided for under that 2011 Law was not created until 2015 (Royal Decree 1067/2015). The delay in it becoming fully operational (early 2017) explains why the last call for applications (2017) for research project funding was still aligned with the directives of the 2013-2016 plan, because the eighth and current one (for the 2017-2020 period) was published in December 2017, once the call for applications for that year had closed.

<sup>4</sup> In the case of Humanities and Social Sciences, for example, those of Law, Economics, Education, Psychology, History and Social Sciences, among others; with the sub-areas of Sociology and Political Science coming under Social Sciences.

for applications within the framework of the sixth National R&D Plan, when the Social Sciences area was reorganised into four sub-areas of knowledge: Sociology, Political Science, Geography and Communication. Since then, they have also had specific “Communication” coordinators and experts to assess the submitted projects.

Indeed, the recognition of Communication for these purposes had an immediate impact on the number of funded projects in the area from 2010. The demands relating to research activity imposed by the *Academia* programme for university teaching staff accreditation probably contributed to that too. In this respect, the data are fragmentary and uncertain, especially for the period prior to 2010, precisely because the sphere was spread across different areas of the National Plan. Be that as it may, between 2004 and 2009<sup>5</sup>, a mean of 14 Communication projects per call for applications were successful (a minimum of eight in 2005 and a maximum of 21 in 2009). Then, in the eight calls for applications issued between 2010 and 2017, the mean rose to 25 funded projects per call, reaching a maximum of 32 in 2013. As we said, that boost can probably be traced back to the implementation of the *Academia* programme in 2008, with the significant increase from 12 projects approved in 2008 to 21 in 2009, the year when the *research pressure* exerted by the accreditation procedure began to be felt. However, it was reinforced by a decision that, in the period considered here (2004-2017), managed to practically double the number of funded Communication projects per call for applications: the recognition of Communication as a management area in the State RD&I Plan. It was a science policy measure that, as we shall see, would take Communication research in Spain in directions that researchers had been reticent to take.

### 3. Changes in the structure and practices of the scientific community

The changes that the institutional framework supporting Spanish Communication research has undergone over the past 30 years have left their mark on the structure and research practices of the scientific community committed to the development of this disciplinary field. Its exponential growth and acquired internal diversity; the gradual incorporation of women into Communication research; the intensity of the *secondary* institutionalisation process led by scientific associations, research centres and groups, and specialised journals and editorial collections; and the consolidation of its presence on international circuits of knowledge production and dissemination (publications, conferences, research projects, etc.) are some of the most outstanding features of the changes affecting the scientific community over the past 30 years.

#### 3.1. Growth and internal diversity of the scientific community

The *boom* in Communication studies since the 1990s has led to a ten-fold increase in the number of Spanish universities that include *Communication* in their programme offerings, rising from the four pioneering universities to 54 universities in 2015. The number of teaching and research faculty members in this field has also increased by a similar rate. According to the most reliable data, the figure is around 4,500 members, nearly 10 times more than 30 years ago. The expansion of Communication studies has therefore led to a massive incorporation of lecturers on whom academic professionalisation expectations are placed, which requires – and particularly demandingly so since the implementation of the university accreditation system – them to develop a sustained research track record that is subject to external assessment.

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<sup>5</sup> The figures we go on to give come from a combination of data, including those provided by García Jiménez (2006, p. 159-160), those generated by the MapCom project for the 2007-2013 period (<http://www.mapcom.es/bases-de-datos>) and those directly obtained from the State RD&I Plan (<http://www.idi.mineco.gob.es/portal/site/MICINN/>).

A good indicator of such growth of the scientific community is the evolution of doctoral theses defended in Communication faculties since their creation (López Escobar & Martín Algarra, 2017, p. 97-98), totalling 250 between 1979 and 1989; 569 from 1990 to 1998; and 948 in the period 2007-2013<sup>6</sup>. Although the time periods are not equal, a geometric progression is clear to see, in which the number of theses submitted and, therefore, the number of doctors doubles from one period to the next, reaching a mean of 135 new doctors in Communication Sciences per year in the most recent period (2007-2013). And while some of the members of that qualified staff were foreign graduates, mainly Latin Americans, who would go on to pursue their academic careers in their respective countries, the data are revealing enough to show the exponential growth of the scientific community and, above all, the *pressure* being exerted on a university access and promotion system linked, like never before, to research productivity.

As already mentioned, the first Spanish Information Sciences faculties focused on Journalism teaching and research, and relegated the remainder of the field's specialisations to a subsidiary position. However, the latter gained definitive institutional recognition with the implementation of three distinct degrees in Journalism, Audiovisual Communication, and Advertising and Public Relations in 1991. That decision had immediate *academic effects*, strengthening teaching activity and scientific research in domains that had traditionally been neglected by Spanish faculties. Moreover, those faculties would be responsible for the organisation and provision of knowledge for specific degrees and postgraduate programmes from then on.

The data on the evolution of *doctoral activity* – i.e., on researcher training – in these spheres are enlightening: 60% of theses on Public Relations submitted to Spanish universities between 1965 and 2004 were defended between 1995 and 2004, that is, by the first groups of graduates of the degree in Advertising and Public Relations (Castillo & Xifra, 2006). Something similar happened in another specialisation linked to that degree, Advertising, in which 72% of the 260 doctoral theses recorded between 1974 and 2010 were defended from 1996 onwards (Marcos, Martínez Pestaña & Blasco, 2012). Regarding Audiovisual Communication, the data compiled by Repiso, Torres and Delgado (2011a) showed spectacular growth in the number of doctoral works on Radio between 1998 and 2007. Sixty-five theses were submitted in those 10 years alone, compared to the 52 submitted in the two previous decades (1978-1997). And the same thing occurred with those dedicated to Television (Repiso, Torres & Delgado, 2011b); nearly 70% of the theses submitted to Spanish faculties from 1976 were defended in that same period (1998-2007). Everything therefore seems to indicate that these spheres expanded considerably as soon as university degrees specific to them became available, thus contributing to a gradual diversification of knowledge interests to which the Spanish scientific community involved in Communication research attended.

### 3.2. Incorporation of women into the scientific community

In a field traditionally dominated by men, not enough attention has yet been paid to the incorporation of women into the scientific community. To begin with, we do not have at our disposal reliable figures about the distribution by gender of teaching staff assigned to degrees in Communication at

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<sup>6</sup> Jones, Baró, Landa and Ontalba (2000, p. 23) offer data on the evolution of doctoral theses on Communication defended at Spanish universities between 1926 and 1998, with a total count of 1,550, which López Escobar and Martín Algarra (2017, p. 98) dispute because it includes those prior to 1979, the year when the first thesis was submitted to an Information Sciences faculty. That thesis was defended by Ángel Faus Belau at the University of Navarra. They also dispute the count because it includes “several hundred [that] were done in faculties of other specialisations”. The discrepancy obviously resides in the “thematic” criterion employed by the former and the “institutional” criterion employed by the latter. Here, we stick to the figures given by López Escobar and Martín Algarra to maintain the consistency of the data they provide. These authors refine the number of theses defended between 1979 and 1998 by applying the aforementioned “institutional” criterion, and they expand the information to include the 2007-2013 period.

Spanish universities. As a result, whatever we say about it must be based on the data provided by an analysis of the authorship of doctoral theses defended at Communication faculties, and of works published in specialised scientific journals. The latter are a good indicator of the characteristics of a scientific community that is really practising – i.e., one that contributes, by publishing, to knowledge production. However, they are usually circumstantial, referring either to specific moments in time (Castillo & Carretón, 2010; Escribà & Cortiñas, 2013) or to specific spheres (Piñeiro, 2016; Baladrón, Manchado & Correyero, 2017). Above all, they do not offer a historical perspective that would otherwise enable us to assess the process of the incorporation of women into Communication research.

The data provided by those works showed a reasonably balanced distribution of their authorship by gender. That was what Castillo and Carretón (2010, p. 310) found, although the data referred exclusively to works published by a sample of journals in 2008. Escribà and Cortiñas (2013, p. 38) expanded the timeframe to the 2007-2011 period for works published in seven Spanish journals, and they found that men accounted for 60% and women for 40% of all authorships. The results obtained by Piñeiro (2016, pp. 40-41) showed a significant increase in the presence of women in Radio research between 1980 and 2013. However, the time periods they established were so long (1980-1994 and 1995-2013) that a clear progression could not be gleaned from them, particularly for the most recent period. Nevertheless, whereas women signed just 20% of the published works (7 out of 35) in the 1980-1994 period, that figure rose to a little over 50% between 1995 and 2013 (189 out of 367). From these data, that author inferred an “incipient feminisation of Radio research” in Spain (Piñeiro, 2016, p. 41). Baladrón, Manchado and Correyero (2017, p. 10) analysed the authorship of Advertising research between 1980 and 2015, with an overall distribution for the entire period of 50.3% men and 49.7% women; regrettably, they did not disaggregate the data by time period.

More revealing still, due to its exhaustiveness, is the picture that can be obtained from the evolution of doctoral thesis authorship. The data recorded by Jones, Baró, Landa and Ontalba (2000, p. 23) showed that theses produced by women accounted for a little over 10% of the total in the 1970s (9 out of 77). The proportion rose to around 30% in the 1980s (140 out of 460) and stagnated at a similar percentage in 1990-1998 period (37%, 368 out of 993). However, in the 2000s, that situation seemed to have changed significantly and, between 2007 and 2013, the 977 defended doctoral works were distributed equally between men and women (49.6% and 50.4%, respectively)<sup>7</sup>. For the time period between the two mentioned above (1999-2006), the specific case of Public Relations theses stands out in particular, since 56% of them were defended by women in the decade spanning 1996-2005 (Castillo & Xifra, 2006, p. 150). The balanced gender distribution in Spanish Communication research therefore seems to be a recent phenomenon, probably from the 2000s onwards.

Be that as it may, this situation of balance does not yet reflect the “feminisation” of Communication studies in Spain. Although we do not have at our disposal historical data, or even data for the set of degrees, the *explorations* made so far are very clear in this respect. In the 1999/2000 academic year, around 70% of graduates of the degrees offered at that time were women (ANECA, 2005, p. 149); and nearly 15 years later, in the 2012/2013 academic year, the percentage of graduates in Journalism was practically the same (Rivero, Meso & Peña, 2015). Thus, although the presence of men and women in the scientific community is balanced, the position of the former in university teaching and research seems to be higher than their relative weight among Communication graduates.

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<sup>7</sup> Data obtained by exploiting the research project and doctoral thesis database generated by the MapCom project for the 2007-2013 period (<http://www.mapcom.es/bases-de-datos>).

### 3.3. *Secondary institutionalisation of communication research*

If the *boom* in Communication studies from the 1990s led to the development of an institutional framework within specific university departments, which was conducive to the consolidation of Communication research in Spain, then no less could be said of the intense *secondary* institutionalisation process embarked upon by the scientific community through the creation of scientific associations, research groups, and specialised journals and editorial collections. The history of this process largely remains to be written, however.

Spanish scientific societies linked to the sphere of Communication emerged with the creation of the Association of Communication Researchers in 1982, which became defunct in the 1990s after a change of name in the previous decade to the Association of Communication Researchers of the Spanish State. The Spanish Association of Semiotics was created in 1983, the Catalan Society of Communication a year later, and the Spanish Association of Film Historians in 1988. That tendency to specialise has been a characteristic feature since then, with the emergence of associations grouping together specialists in Journalism (1990), History of Communication (1992), Educational Communication (2000), Public Relations (2004), Political Communication (2008) and Health Communication (2013), many of which are also open to the respective professional sectors. To these it is necessary to add others that are more generic and generally regional in their scope<sup>8</sup>. That *secondary* institutionalisation task undeniably culminated in the creation of the Spanish Association of Communication Research in 2006, and we are now beginning to see evidence of its boost to Communication research in Spain (Rodríguez Gómez, 2016).

Much scarcer, not to say non-existent, is an analysis of Spanish Communication research centres and groups. Regarding the research centres, we cannot fail to highlight the importance that bodies such as Telefónica's Foundation for the Development of the Social Function of Communications (Fundesco, 1969), the Government of Catalonia's Communication Research Centre (1987) (Jones, 1998b), and the Autonomous University of Barcelona's Communication Institute (1997) have had in this field. And, regarding the research groups, only recently has attention begun to be focused on them (Mancinas *et al.*, 2015; Tur, 2017). Although we now at least have a repository that identifies 213 of them in Spain currently<sup>9</sup>, the task of analysing such fundamental aspects as their level of activity, scientific production, internal structure, operation, etc. has yet to be done. As far as editorial activity in the sphere of Communication is concerned, the first specialised collections by imprints such as Gustavo Gili, Paidós, Cátedra and Ariel, among others, were crucial to the take-off of Communication research in Spain from the mid-1980s, yet there are practically no studies on their development and impact on the scientific community (Giménez Toledo & Tejada, 2012).

In this *secondary* institutionalisation process, the aspect that has been covered the best is that of specialised academic journals, a sector that has developed exponentially in recent years, coinciding with the success of the *paper* as a highly valued scientific Communication format for the purposes of accrediting research track records since the implementation of the *Academia* programme in 2008 (see section 3 of this work). The impressive status gained by scientific journals in terms of attributing prestige to researchers through a kind of *metonymical transfer*, where the citations received by all the

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<sup>8</sup> For some brief notes on the 1980s, see <http://ae-ic.org.es/la-asociacion/historia/>. In regard to specialised associations, we are specifically referring to the Spanish Journalism Association (1990), the Spanish Association of Communication Historians (1992), the Association of Educommunicators (2000), the Spanish Association of Public Relations (2004), the Political Communication Association (2008) and the Spanish Association of Health Communication (2013). Among those of a general nature, we find the Galician Association of Communication Researchers (2000), the Association for Communication Development (2007) and the Latin Society of Social Communication (2009), among others.

<sup>9</sup> See [http://www.mapcom.es/media/files/interactivo\\_mapa\\_grupos/index.html](http://www.mapcom.es/media/files/interactivo_mapa_grupos/index.html)

works published in a certain period (the *impact factor*) automatically become indicative of the value and quality of each one; in our view, such an impressive status held by journals explains why the interest in analysing them has focused on the discussion and refinement of indicators (editorial protocols, database visibility, experts' opinions, accessibility, etc.) that help to sort them into hierarchised catalogues, the well-known *impact rankings* (Giménez Toledo & Alcaín, 2006; Fonseca, 2011; Giménez Toledo, 2011; Baladrón & Correyero, 2012; Delgado & Repiso, 2013).

The possibilities for *personalised* scientific dissemination that the new digital environment has generated (institutional repositories, academic social networks, etc.) may indeed be sending shockwaves through the privileged *gatekeeper* position that journals in the knowledge distribution system have enjoyed for so long, but the fact that it is now feasible to determine the specific *impact* of each researcher, with the *h-index* leading the way<sup>10</sup> (De Pablos, Mateos & Túnuez, 2013; Túnuez, 2013; Gómez Calderón & Roses, 2015; Costa, 2017), does not detract from the fact that the researchers' assessment and prestige is going to continue to depend on parameters of the type mentioned above. And, having lost all sense of humility, that kind of *ranking fever* will end up giving us lists, not of journals, but of more or less cited authors, like those lists that are already popular in other disciplines (Salgado & Páez, 2007). This may feed academic vanity – or even fuel rivalry between colleagues – but it is a somewhat vulgar criterion for fairly assessing researchers' merit and influence.

Returning to the journals, the fact is that we are neglecting to analyse researchers' track records and contributions because we are so preoccupied with the game of *rankings*, visibility management or strategies to optimise the incipient practice called *research marketing* (Túnuez, 2013, pp. 54-55). Despite being a more important task, such analysis in Spanish Communication research is scarce (García Galindo, 2013). To fill this gap, first we should stop thinking of them as *scientific metrics* fodder alone, and once again concern ourselves with the institutional role they play, or at least should play, in the scientific ecosystem, which is not that of serving as mere channels for knowledge dissemination, but that of spearheading epistemological debates and guiding research at any given time. And that requires the restoration of their *collective intellectual* status, which they should never have lost in the first place, instead of reducing them to the dullest role of simply being citation generators<sup>11</sup>.

### 3.4. Internationalisation of the scientific community

Of the various “ANECA effects”, the internationalisation of the scientific community is perhaps the one on which we have more rigorous evidence, at least in regard to the evolution of the presence of Spanish researchers in specialised journals published outside Spain, and especially in those included in international databases and hierarchised lists according to their *impact factor*. The data provided by Fernández Quijada and Masip (2013) on works signed by Spanish authors between 1980 and 2010 in international journals included in the Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) and the Arts & Humanities Citation Index (AHCI) showed a slow progression with numerous ups and downs over the 20 years from 1986 – there were no records beforehand – to 2006, in which 18 works were

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<sup>10</sup> Although also used by databases such as the Web of Science, which is responsible for JCR, and Scopus, the personalised *h-index* “revolution” comes with a refinement of Google Scholar Metrics, which trawls the Internet for citations received by works published on it. However, the algorithms' ability to locate such citations depends on the researchers themselves when it comes to standardising their signature of authorship so that papers can be attributed to them by the search engine, and to keeping their profiles up to date to prevent *false attributions* due to coinciding names, surnames or initials. And all this is obviously besides the fact that it is impossible for those algorithms to find anything that is not within the digital environment.

<sup>11</sup> Of Gramscian origin, we use the term *collective intellectual* in the sense that José Luis López Aranguren used it in “*El País* como empresa y como ‘intelectual colectivo’”, published in *El País* on 7 June 1981.

identified, the highest number in that period. From that moment on, the evolution was steady, though there was a clear turning point in 2009 when 60 articles were published, more than double the previous year's number (28).

Although these data refer exclusively to journals included in databases in which publications from the Anglosphere are overrepresented, they are nevertheless indicative of a change in behaviour among Spanish Communication researchers. It is therefore tempting to link that to the conditions set by the reward system implemented in 2008, which is based around *six-year rewards*, and to university teaching staff accreditation. The results from a work on the presence of Spanish authors in journals not published in Spain but included in the Communication catalogues of JCR and Scopus in the decade spanning 2003-2012 have provided additional evidence in the same sense (Martínez Nicolás, 2014). Thus, of the 196 contributions recorded, 29% of them were published between 2003 and 2008, and 71% of them corresponded to the period of full implementation of the *Academia* programme, with such a *shift* in progression between 2008 and 2009 – when the number of articles rose from 19 to 41 – that it seems difficult not to attribute it to the impact of those new university accreditation requirements.

The presence of Spanish authors in journals not published in Spain is not the only bibliometric indicator for assessing the intensity of internationalisation of Spanish Communication research. Indeed, in that very sense, various authors have, for example, pointed to the increase in collaboration between Spanish and foreign researchers (Fernández Quijada & Masip, 2013, p. 19-20); to the presence in Spanish journals of authors working in other countries, although they are generally assigned to Latin American universities (Escribà & Cortiñas, 2013, p. 39-40); and, lastly, to widespread familiarity with international bibliography, albeit with a curious behaviour that causes it to be cited much more often (54.2% compared to 10.4% of the references) in papers appearing in journals published outside Spain than in papers appearing in journals published in Spain (Casado & Fernández Quijada, 2015, p. 80).

Be that as it may, and regardless of how significant those indicators might be, a proper assessment of this internationalisation process requires us to expand the focus beyond strict scientific production and, above all, to avoid falling into the trap of assuming that it is a recent phenomenon. Indeed, the dissemination of works on international circuits (journals, conferences, etc.) and participation in teams and projects in this sphere are fundamental factors of the scientific community's internationalisation, and the position gained over a 10-year period in this respect probably bears no parallel to previous periods. However, the *international projection* of Spanish Communication research has a long history that, to a large extent, has yet to be reconstructed. An essential chapter of that history would have to be the intense activity undertaken to internationally connect our scientific community when this disciplinary field was in its infancy in Spain<sup>12</sup>.

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<sup>12</sup> Among such actions, perhaps worthy of special mention is the organisation of the IAMCR-AIERI conferences in 1968 (Pamplona) and 1988 (Barcelona) at decisive times for boosting research in this field. Indeed, they represented the first steps of continued Spanish participation in international scientific associations (Vicente, 2017). Alongside the first generation of lecturers at Information Sciences faculties (especially Ángel Benito and Miquel de Moragas, whose selection of papers in *Sociología de la comunicación de masas* [Barcelona: Gustavo Gili, 1985] decisively contributed to the dissemination in Spain of different international traditions such as functionalism, semiotics, political economy, Communication for development, cultural studies, etc.), was José Vidal Beneyto (1927-2010), a key figure in that dissemination task. He actively contributed to the *Research Committee on Communication, Knowledge and Culture* of the International Sociological Association (ISA), a committee of which he was president between 1974 and 1990, and whose members and vice-presidents included Kurt Lang, Marino Livolsi, Elihu Katz, Denis McQuail, Tamas Szczesko, Lothar Bisky and Peter Dahlgren, among others (<http://www.rc14-isa.com/history>). He also became an indefatigable promoter of Communication research in Spain. The first milestone of his promotional work was probably the organisation of the *Industria de la cultura y modelos de sociedad* International Symposium held in Burgos in July 1979,

#### 4. Characteristics of scientific production in the field of communication

Changes in the institutional context and in the structure of the academic community cannot have failed to affect the general direction of scientific production in the field of Communication over the past 25 or 30 years; that is, the practices, modes and epistemological choices applied to the task of generating knowledge in this disciplinary field. This is almost certainly the most controversial and poorly addressed aspect of the Communication *research system* in Spain, with the exception, that is, of some of its most *objectifiable* characteristics (publication formats, collaborative networks, etc.). Poorly addressed, above all, when it is about obtaining a general epistemological framework (dominant objects of study, theoretical approaches, methodological perspectives, etc.) where the scarcity of data and the divergence in the categories used in the available works make reconstruction difficult. And controversial because, based on deficient empirical evidence, attempting to point out the observed changes in trends and to highlight the factors that could have caused them are risky exercises. Nevertheless, and however imperfect the result might be, it is a risk that we should start to assume.

##### 4.1. Success of the scientific paper

Growth in the publication of works in specialised Spanish journals – i.e., scientific *papers* – has been relentless since the 1980s. In this respect, the most exhaustive census may be the one done by (2016, p. 36) between 1980 and 2013, which shows two clearly marked temporal turning points: one in 1996, the year when published articles had comfortably doubled compared to 1995 (from 125 to 265); and another around 2008, when they had increased 40% compared to 2007 (rising from 514 to 715). In the 1980-1995 period, the annual mean of works in Spanish Communication journals was slightly higher than 63, compared to around 20 in the early years (1980-1984), a low figure for obvious reasons. The sharp increase recorded from 1996 meant that the mean number of papers per year rose to 440 between 1996 and 2007. And between 2008 and 2013, that figure practically doubled to a mean of 800 articles per year, and did not fall below 700 published works in journals published in Spain alone in any of the years<sup>13</sup>. It was in that latter period that we saw the unquestionable culmination of the success of the scientific *paper* in Spanish Communication research.

When looking for an explanation for that behaviour, it is once again tempting to link the recorded change in trend around the mid-1990s to the multiplication of Communication studies and to the consequent growth of the scientific community that, especially in the new specialised centres, created journals to provide an outlet for their scientific production. And it is just as tempting to link the *step change* observed from 2008 to the implementation of the *Academia* programme for teaching staff accreditation and the value placed precisely on research disseminated via scientific journals from that time on. Additional data pointing in the same direction are those relating to the evolution in the number of Communication journals published in Spain between 1980 and 2015<sup>14</sup>. To the five *existing* titles in 1990, new ones were slowly added throughout the 1990s, reaching a total of 29 in 2001. In

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with anyone who had anything to say about Communication research at that time in attendance (the programme is available at <http://roderic.uv.es/bitstream/handle/10550/53126/JVB1030.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>). I would like to thank Enrique Bustamante for pointing out that Vidal Beneyto was, as I said, a key figure in this history (personal interview, 13 February 2017), and Rebeca Martínez Fernández, an INCOMES-25 project intern, for locating the 1979 International Symposium documents.

<sup>13</sup> A similar trend can be observed in the data provided by Fernández Quijada and Masip (2013, p. 18) for the 1980-2010 period.

<sup>14</sup> The data we go on to give come from Fernández Quijada and Masip (2013, p. 22), revised and updated to 2015 with information from the Observatory of Social Sciences Scientific Journals for the Communication Area (<http://www.observatoriorevistascientificas.com/index.php/revistas/comunicacion>).



2002, coinciding with the creation of ANECA, a small *jump* was observed, taking the number of journals published in that year to 34 (five more than in 2001). The number then continued to rise by one or two per year until 2009, when it reached a total of 45. Eight journals were launched in 2011 and a further 10 in 2012 (i.e., 18 in two years, as many as those founded in the decade spanning 2000-2009). Then, with the *Academia* programme in full swing, growth in the number of journals was staggering; by 2015, 69 titles were being published in Spain: a breeding ground that was ripe for, or indeed spurred on by, the success of the scientific *paper*.

The article is obviously not the only format that researchers use to disseminate the results of their work. It co-exists alongside other scientific products (books, conference presentations, reports, *grey literature*, etc.) that have indeed been relegated to subsidiary positions in the scientific publication ecosystem due to the preferential, if not dominant, position conferred on the article by the institutional scientific research reward system under which the *six-year rewards* and accreditation were established (Soriano, 2008 and 2017)<sup>15</sup>. However, beyond that undeniably interesting issue, thought should perhaps be directed instead at determining how the scientific *paper* format is effectively conditioning how Communication research is being conducted in Spain.

Although the indicators probably need to be refined and supported by empirical evidence that is more robust and diverse, we do have a number of suggestive hypotheses in this respect. The issue has been raised especially vigorously by Goyanes (2015 and 2017), for whom *the scientific paper and journal culture*, fuelled by that reward system, encourages *standardised* research that leads to what he calls *isomorphism*; that is, “the collective thought that, by us all doing the same, we are more right” (Goyanes, 2017, p. 29). This might range from seemingly minor manifestations such as the requirement to shoehorn the scientific papers into the IMRaD structure – one of those “new grammars” of scientific writing about which Sierra (2016) suggests we should be cautious – to others that are more important such as thematic hyperspecialisation, scientific *tribalism*, methodological fetishism or, lastly, the bureaucratisation of research activity that tends to put the cultivation of the scientific *paper* on a pedestal.

Indeed, the conciseness that the scientific *paper* requires would tend to favour such hyperspecialisation among researchers, prompting them to resolve any infinitesimal shortcomings in available knowledge – the detection of “gaps” as referred to by Goyanes (2017, pp. 57-65) – driven by a kind of *hubris* that fuels the formation of academic *tribes* devoted to learning more and more about less and less until arriving at a point where they know absolutely everything about nothing. That “barbarity of *specialism*” about which Ortega y Gasset warned us nearly a century ago, when he could not have imagined the magnitude that the “revolt of the [academic] masses” would reach, is now also spurred on by a publishing business, that of *journals*, which is ready and prepared to provide any of those *tribes* with their own specialised journal. This purpose, this new ecosystem, is creating a scientific community in which there is beginning to be an abundance of *hedgehogs* and a shortage of *foxes*<sup>16</sup>, and which, by indulging that methodological *fetishism* that Goyanes (2017, pp.

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<sup>15</sup> Be that as it may, a proper assessment of that *scientific publication ecosystem* requires due consideration of all the species inhabiting it. Thus, for example, it would be necessary to assess the recent trend of publishing Communication “books” (as well as monographs or special issues in journals) that directly arise from contributions made at conferences and scientific meetings, which, therefore, are merely collections of *papers*. Generally speaking, this comes with the added problem of lax requirements for the initial selection of contributions, on which decisions are made based on a short abstract. They are then edited once payment has been made by the authors, who simply buy an editorial stamp to disseminate “books” without any external control by means of an appropriate review by experts. Regarding *grey literature*, we should applaud the insistence by some authors that such literature produced in the academic field has not diminished scientific research in the sphere of Communication in Spain (Gaitán, 2014; Soriano, 2017).

<sup>16</sup> See José Ortega y Gasset: *La rebelión de las masas* (1929), chapter XII, “La barbarie del ‘especialismo’” (translated here in English as the “barbarity of *specialism*”). The allusion to *hedgehogs* and *foxes* comes from the well-known

39-48) also denounces, seems to be abdicating its duty of epistemological vigilance and reflexivity that scientific work requires (Bourdieu, Chamboredon & Passeron, 1973; Vassallo de Lopes, 1990) in order to pursue poorly understood yet highly rewarded research *productivity*.

## 4.2. Take-off of collaborative research

Collaborative research practices giving rise to works signed by several authors enable us to determine the level of integration and formation of epistemic networks – generated by shared epistemological orientations: objects of study, theories, methods, etc. – in a scientific community. The reconstruction of academic networks deployed in doctoral thesis examination panels, for example, also serves that purpose (Repiso, Torres & Delgado, 2011a, 2011b and 2013; Casanueva & Caro, 2013). Very little attention has been paid to this issue in Spanish Communication *meta-research*. Moreover, what little attention has been paid to it focuses on the case of signed articles in journals and thus does not consider the diversity of formats that scientific collaboration among researchers may take (collective books, conference presentations, report elaboration, etc.).

And although there is not much of it either, available empirical evidence on the evolution of the *authorship regime* of works published in scientific journals suggests a significant increase in collaborative practices in Communication research in Spain, with a clear turning point around 2008. Fernández Quijada and Masip (2013, pp. 19-20) analysed the articles signed by Spanish researchers in 43 specialised journals between 1980 and 2013, and, in the case of journals published in Spain, they found that single-author works accounted for approximately 85% of all those published between 1980 and 2007, a trend that changed very clearly from 2008 with a sustained increase in the number of multi-author papers in the three years that followed. Between 2007 and 2008, collaborative research rose from 17% to 22%, and, from that moment on, it continued to increase, reaching nearly 30% in 2010. In other words, that way of working practically doubled in a space of four years (2007 to 2010), breaking a pattern that had hardly changed over the previous 25 years. The pattern for publishing in international journals was mostly that of multi-authorship across the period analysed by those authors, although the volume of works makes the behaviour observed between 2007 and 2010 especially significant because there was a constant increase in the proportion of papers signed by various authors over those four years, which went up from 60.9% to 67.4%.

A similar result was obtained from a recent study on five journals published in Spain over the 1990-2014 period (Martínez Nicolás, Carrasco & Martínez Fernández, 2017). The study showed that the growth of co-author works was slow yet sustained between 1990 and 2009, rising from 10% in the 1990-1994 period to just over 25% in the 2005-2009 period. However, in the last five-year period (2010-2014), they accounted for more than half of all the works. Although referring exclusively to Advertising research, Baladrón, Machado and Correyero (2017, p. 6) provided additional data on the then recent boost to collaborative practices that, in this specific sphere, had shot up between 2011 and 2015, also accounting for around 50% of works published in each year of that period.

Continuity in the progression of collaborative research published in scientific journals since 2008-2009 suggests that what we have before us is a consolidated trend, from which it is possible to infer a structural change in a scientific community that, in recent years, has become more integrated and has formed more academic networks. Here too it is tempting to link the rise in such collaboration practices to the requirements established for accreditation and for the *six-year rewards* for research, with the latter being essential merits for promotion at Spanish universities, but not for access to them.

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distinction proposed by Isaiah Berlin in his essay *The Hedgehog and the Fox* (1953), in which he identifies two human attitudes and behaviours, especially in the intellectual sphere: those who know about many things (the foxes), and those who know a lot, but only about one thing (the hedgehogs).

The temptation to establish that link has likewise given rise to a kind of *cynical* hypothesis according to which the substantial growth in multi-author works is not so much a reflection of the formation of academic networks as it is of spurious *authorship exchange*. Indeed, being an object of value so sought after by the institutional reward system (six-year rewards, accreditation), it would surely be a *waste* for the benefit that publishing in scientific journals might bring to be attributed to a single author, and especially so under circumstances of tough competition in terms of getting a paper published in such journals. Consequently, and according to this *cynical* hypothesis, that institutionally induced picaresque approach may have enhanced the vigour displayed by co-authorship in Spanish Communication research in recent years.

Such *authorship exchange* (“I’ll credit you, you credit me”) may of course occur. But before resolving the issue so expeditiously, it is worth taking note of other data that may help to assess it more appropriately. With records of 14 Spanish journals for the years 2007 and 2008, Fernández Quijada (2010, p. 564) found that “most co-authorships pertained to the same institution, and inter-institutional collaboration was an infrequent phenomenon [...]”. However, more recent data indicate that the pattern has clearly been changing since then. Despite the limited nature of our sample, our analysis of the authorship regime in five Spanish journals between 1990 and 2014 (Martínez Nicolás, Carrasco & Martínez Fernández, 2017) showed a noticeable change in trend over that 15-year period – the results were not significant for the 1990s – in which works signed by researchers assigned to different universities (inter-institutional) went up from 6% in the 2000-2004 period to nearly 23% in the 2005-2009, and to more than 34% in 2010-2014. In other words, in the latter years covered by that study, a third of collaborative research published in the analysed journals was inter-institutional, whereas just a decade earlier, it did not even reach a tenth. Furthermore, collaborative works generated by funded projects in that same 15-year period slowly increased from 8.6% in 2000-2004 to 11.5% in 2005-2009, and rose sharply to 27.6% in 2010-2014, nearly three times higher than in the previous five-year period. This coincided precisely with the recognition of Communication as a specific field in the State RD&I Plan, and with the growth in the number of funded projects in the area.

Flying in the face of that *cynical* hypothesis of authorship exchange, these data showed, for at least the last decade of the period covered, that the scientific community committed to the sphere of Communication was undergoing a rigorous process of integration, firstly with the formation of multi-centre networks that were probably less permeable to such a spurious exchange than in-house networks formed within departments and faculties, and above all with the organisation of research teams that, as a general rule, were also multi-centre ones. The latter were of course necessary in order to be able to plan and execute projects of the appropriate magnitude to successfully compete in the most financially and curricularly beneficial calls for applications: those of Spain’s State Plan and the various European programmes. In sum, these factors should be taken into consideration if we want to fairly assess the rise in collaborative research over the past 10 years.

### 4.3. General direction of communication research

*Content* analysis, as it were, of scientific production in certain disciplinary fields can take two directions, neither of which has been addressed fully or in depth by Spanish Communication *meta-research*. One of those directions – demanding and generally applied to domains or specific problems – aims to assess the contributions to, and the weaknesses and pending challenges of, conducted research, taking it as the starting point from which to propose heuristic alternatives of a theoretical or methodological nature to mitigate those weaknesses and address those challenges. In reference to Spanish Communication research, works of this type are few and far between. Indeed, we only have a small number, and these are on certain theoretical perspectives (e.g., Vicente &

López Rabadán, 2009; Ardèvol, 2015; and Varela, 2016, on *framing* studies) or specific spheres (Martínez Nicolás, 2006, on Journalism; Almiron & Reig, 2007, on the political economy of Communication; De Miguel, 2007, and García Jiménez, 2007, on Sociology and Communication theories, respectively; Martínez Nicolás, 2007, on Communication policy; and Fernández Viso, 2012, and Marí, 2017, on Communication for social change).

The other direction – no less demanding in its execution – reports on the general state of play of research by attending to the diverse *epistemological components* it comprises: knowledge interests or objects of study that attract researchers' efforts; the theoretical approaches taken to address them; the research modalities – theoretical, empirical – they employ; and, lastly, the methods and techniques to which they resort. Here too there is a shortage of works, since we researchers are comfortably set on uncovering those aspects of scientific production that bibliometrically *stare us in the face* (authorship patterns, universities of provenance, researcher networks, citation styles, use of references, etc.) instead of shedding light on other aspects that require the *interpretative gaze* of an expert in the field (objects of study, types of research, methodological quality, etc.). Although they focus on the analysis of production published in scientific journals, here too we have a number of valuable works (Castillo & Carretón, 2010; López Rabadán & Vicente, 2011; Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2011; Martínez Nicolás, 2014; Baladrón, Correyero & Manchado, 2014; Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2016; Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016 and 2017; Piñeiro, 2016; Barranquero & Limón, 2017; Caffarel, Ortega & Gaitán, 2017), but the disparity between the categories used to account for those *epistemological components* hinders the task of reconstructing the characteristics of Spanish Communication research over the past 25 or 30 years. Despite that, we shall endeavour to present those general directions.

#### 4.3.1. Diversification of knowledge interests

The internal diversity acquired by the scientific community as a result of the establishment of distinct Communication degrees in the early 1990s (see section 2.2.) boosted research in those Communication and Media spheres, such as Advertising, Public Relations and Corporate Communication, and Audiovisual Communication, which had traditionally been relegated to a subsidiary position compared to the attention paid to the field of Journalism. The data provided by Castillo and Carretón (2010, p. 311) for 2008 pointed to the fact that Journalism was still the predominant “thematic area” in 10 Spanish journals (22.3% of the papers), way ahead of those dedicated to Television (13.7%), Advertising (9%) and Public Relations (7.4%). However, the results obtained from the analysis of a sample of 1,000 articles signed by Spanish researchers in five specialised journals published in Spain (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016 and 2017) showed a gradual diversification of those knowledge interests over the past 25 years. Of the works recorded in the 1990-1994 period (in the only two active journals of the five selected), 70% studied issues relating to Journalism, though the proportion began to fall continuously from the mid-2000s (2005-2009 period) to just above 40% in the final period (2010-2014), when articles on Audiovisual Communication accounted for a quarter of all published articles, and those referring to Advertising and Public Relations accounted for 20% of that whole. A similar trend was observed in works by Spanish authors in international journals included in JCR and Scopus between 2003 and 2012 (Martínez Nicolás, 2014). Around 25% of those published in 2012 addressed Journalism, but more than 42% studied aspects of Audiovisual Communication, Advertising or Public Relations, the latter of which was particularly prominent (20% of the *international* papers in that year). Over the past decade, Spanish research has paid special attention to new phenomena spawned by the advent of the Internet and the digitalisation process. Of the articles in Spanish journals in 2008 recorded by Castillo and Carretón (2010, p. 311), 8.2% of them addressed those topics. However, in the 2008-2014 period, they accounted for nearly 20% (Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2016, p. 1373), a

percentage similar to the one reached in 2012 in international journals (Martínez Nicolás, 2014), where works by Spanish authors focusing on that digital environment accounted for nearly 25% of those published. In sum, everything seems to point to a gradual diversification of the knowledge interests of a scientific community that no longer primarily or predominantly puts its efforts into journalistic research.

#### 4.3.2. Centrality of media content analysis

Beyond the Communication and Media spheres (Journalism, Advertising, Public Relations and Corporate Communication, Audiovisual Communication, and the Internet) addressed by researchers, a proper consideration of knowledge interests requires, at the very least, an observation of the elements of the Communication process – or of the Communication system, if you will – that are specific objects of study: professionals, businesses and markets, content, technologies, audiences and effects, or other aspects of a reflexive nature such as teaching or Communication research itself. Regrettably, these analysis categories, which are crucial to being able to answer the basic question of *what is being investigated* in a certain discipline (Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2011, p. 108), do not seem to have made their mark on Communication *meta-research*, so very little can be said about them without the support of enough empirical evidence. Be that as it may, the little research that is available (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016) shows that media *content* analysis studies occupy a central position. Generally speaking, such studies usually take the shape of journalistic discourse analysis (news coverage or news treatment of population groups such as youths, immigrants and marginalised groups; situations and events such as health crises, conflicts and elections; spheres such as politics, economy and justice; and phenomena such as gender-based violence and climate change), though some studies do examine other media products (advertisements, television series, film, documents on digital forums, etc.). The data obtained by Zugasti (2013, p. 69) from seven Spanish journals between 2002 and 2012 corroborated that same trend in the specific field of the history of Communication, in which nearly 40% of all the papers published were studies focusing on the “message”. But what is perhaps most significant in this respect is that the primacy of Spanish researchers’ interest in analysing content continued to grow over time, causing a relative decline in attention paid to other elements of the Communication process (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016). Thus, in the early 1990s (1990-1994 period), four out of 10 articles in the Spanish journals analysed were about media content, but five of them focused on aspects relating to business (organisations’ operation, market structure, sectoral public policies, etc.) and professional spheres (production processes, ethical and deontological issues, labour profiles, corporate associations, etc.). From the early 2000s, there was an accelerated shift in the recorded objects and, in the most recent period (2010-2014), six in 10 of the papers published were on content, while only two in 10 were on Communication businesses and professions, standing at the same level as studies on audiences and on reception processes, which rose in the last period from an almost token presence in the two previous decades. Consequently, the data pointed to research that, focusing basically on generating knowledge about the *discursive dimension* of Communication, overlooked the sphere’s *institutional* (businesses, markets, professions, public policies, etc.) and *social* dimensions (audiences, reception, effects and influence of Communication), and shifted towards *content*. And that trend only seemed to pick up pace in the mid-2000 (see Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2017, p. 159, specifically for journalistic research).

#### 4.3.3. Primacy of quantitative empirical research

A similar decline was observed in theoretical research (aimed the discussion of concepts, theories and methods, or at the presentation of the state of play of certain objects or domains) over the past 25 years, during which the empirical direction of Spanish Communication research has been

considerably strengthened (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016 and 2017 for the case of Journalism). According to the results obtained from those works, over the 15 years between 1990 and 2005, articles addressing theoretical problems accounted for around 30% of those published, but they had practically disappeared from the five Spanish journals analysed in the last decade, when they only accounted for one in 10. Methodologically, a strong trend was observed in those works to adopt standard Social Sciences techniques, be they quantitative or qualitative, to the detriment of research based on an analysis of documentary resources (historical archives, corpora of legislative or legal doctrine, codes of ethics, policy or business reports, etc.), which, until the early 2000s, had been the predominant procedure for generating empirical data in Spanish Communication research. From then on, works resorting to those standard techniques (content or discourse analysis, surveys, in-depth interviews, focus groups, etc.) predominated, with a clear preference for quantitative research, which accounted for just over half of the empirical articles published in the 2010-2014 period, a much higher proportion than the 20% that employed qualitative techniques. Practically identical results were obtained by Castillo and Carretón (2010, p. 313) for 2008, when 54% of the selected sample were quantitative studies and 20% were qualitative ones. In contrast, Zugasti (2013, p. 71) showed that, in studies on the history of Communication, “the qualitative approach overwhelmingly outweighed the quantitative one” (nearly 86% of the studies included in the seven Spanish journals between 2002 and 2012). However, as we noted at the time (Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2011, p. 119-120), that may have been due to the propensity to consider all research that does not explicitly resort to quantitative empirical techniques as qualitative research. Indeed, works like these cannot be relegated to a kind of *methodological orphanhood* (where they are neither quantitative nor qualitative). And that is why our proposal is to classify them as *research based on documentary sources*, provided such sources are duly identified and rigorously exploited. Be that as it may, quantitative approach appears to have become firmly embedded in Spanish Communication since the mid-2000, years, with a sharp rise in the past decade.

#### 4.3.4. Marked improvement in methodological quality

In one of the few studies specifically evaluating “methodological approaches” in Spanish Communication research, López Rabadán and Vicente (2011) analysed the methods used in articles published between 2000 and 2009 in four specialised Spanish journals, and they found that, in 43.8% of them, “it was not possible to locate any type of reference to how the research was conducted”. They also found that only 23.8% of them included “a detailed chapter on methodology” and that 32.5% of them “incorporated the odd reference to these aspects” (López Rabadán & Vicente: 2011, p. 9). Albeit with a much narrower timeframe referring only to 2008, Castillo and Carretón (2010, p. 313) observed that “it is surprising to find that, in 23.9% of the articles, there was no method at all”. There is, therefore, more or less robust evidence of the fact that empirical Communication research in Spain was severely lacking in terms of methodology, and that is something we also found in an analysis of a 1998-2007 sample of Spanish journals (Martínez Nicolás & Saperas, 2011, p. 19). However, if we focus attention on the evolution of this parameter, there are reasons to argue that this anomalous situation began to be rectified from the mid-2000s (Martínez Nicolás, Saperas & Carrasco, 2016). The data obtained from articles published by Spanish researchers in five journals published in Spain, grouped into five-year periods, showed that, in the 1990s, the relationship between works that were methodologically deficient and those that showed signs of being methodologically sound remained unchanged, with the proportions standing at 45% and 55%, respectively. In the 2000-2004 period, a slight change in trend was observed in this respect, which became fully consolidated in the last decade. Thus, the proportion of articles with basic methodological shortcomings fell to 27.9% in the 2005-2009 period, and fell again to 13.9% in the most recent period (2010-2014). It is, as we said, a sign of *marked* methodological improvement. What was exclusively considered when assessing the empirical works was whether or not they

resorted to some standardised technique (content analysis, surveys, focus groups, direct observation, etc.), or followed suitable protocols for the analysis of documentary sources. In the case of the former, no assessment was made of whether or not those techniques were correctly applied in accordance with the procedures established by the methodological literature. Be that as it may, and albeit only a sign, the available data continue to evidence the industrious efforts that Spanish Communication researchers have been making to adapt their works to increasingly demanding methodological standards.

## 5. Final thoughts

A review of what has happened in Spanish Communication research over the past 30 years provides us with a picture of a period in which the institutional framework supporting scientific activity in this field has changed profoundly, with two clear turning points: one at the beginning of that period when the University Reform Law was passed (1983), which set in motion a veritable process of university modernisation in Spain; and another in the mid-2000s, after the implementation (2002) and generalisation (2008) of the accreditation system for access to and promotion in university teaching staff faculties, which was more demanding in terms of research requirements. These general institutional changes, accompanied by others that specifically affected the sphere of Communication (multiplication of university study programme offerings, establishment of distinct degrees, recognition of Communication in the State RD&I Plan), would leave a clear mark on the structure and characteristics of the academic community and on the general direction taken in Communication-related scientific production in Spain. Indeed, the impact was so strong that, in light of the data now available, the proposed periodisation of the evolution of Spanish Communication research (Martínez Nicolás, 2008) should probably be revised to situate, around the mid-1980s (after the University Reform Law had been passed), the beginning of a phase that, albeit with the inertia inherited from the time the discipline was founded in Spain, represented a profound renewal (expansion of the *secondary* institutionalisation of the scientific community, connection with international traditions and lines of work, etc.) that would continue for 20 years up to the mid-2000s. Thereafter, the empirical evidence that we have gathered in the latter years of intense *meta-research* points to a *change of cycle*. Given this state of affairs, the key issue is to figure out what path Communication Research in Spain has followed since then.

That *change of cycle* has brought us a more diversified scientific community, with the gradual yet stable incorporation of women into research activity in this sphere. And, in view of the rate of growth in the number of doctoral theses being produced, that community now has sufficient *critical mass* to further develop the field, even though the opportunities for professionalisation within it have dwindled due to the fatefully combined impact of financial cutbacks applied to universities and the greater stringency of access requirements. And, as the backdrop to all of this, we have the unwavering demands for *excellence*, *quality* and *innovation* that are characteristic of the neoliberal *managerialism* to which managers of university policy in Spain seem so attached (Giroto, Mundet & Llinàs, 2013; Quirós, 2016). On a strictly epistemic level, that *change of cycle* seems to point to a type of research that is more diverse in terms of its interests after the long-standing predominance of the journalistic tradition in Spain. It also suggests that such research is well disposed to generating knowledge on the changes brought about by the advent of the Internet and digitalisation in all areas of life in contemporary society, an interest that undeniably puts us in a privileged position in the general field of Humanities and Social Sciences. And, in an especially valuable way, that change also points to an improvement in the rigorousness of the research we are doing, albeit with certain aspects that need to be rectified (the bias towards *content*, the near methodological monoculture of quantitative content analysis, minimal recourse to techniques to obtain data from *living sources*, such as the use of surveys, experimental designs, focus groups, direct observation, etc.). Furthermore, our

research has proven capable of making a place for itself in the international ecosystem of knowledge dissemination (journals, conferences, projects, etc.). Yet all this still comes at a cost of yielding to, or perhaps only converging with, an internationally imposed scientific *standard* (Carrasco & Saperas, 2014 and 2016).

Although we have only been immersed in this state of affairs for no more than 10 years, it may actually be announcing the advent of a new *scientific culture* in Spanish Communication research, the take-off of which will especially involve committed generations of younger people, driven to make research a *way of living*, a kind of necessary routine in an environment bedevilled by the competitive hypertrophy that drives the established reward system. However, as we internalise the fact that researchers have no option but to increase *productivity*, seek *impact* or climb in the *rankings*, we will shape a scientific community in which good, technically proficient *professionals* will abound. That said, it will probably be a scientific community in which we will end up pining for a more ambitious *intellectual* attitude, that is, one that makes Communication research an activity committed to criticism and social intervention rather than a vacuous exercise aimed at accumulating increasingly inane knowledge.

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