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Evolution of the paradigms, methodologies and fields of communication in *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* during the decade 2004-2013

Jesús Bermejo-Berros [[CV](#)] [[ORCID](#)] [[G](#)] University of Valladolid (Spain) / jbermejo@hmca.uva.es

Abstract

Introduction: Both scientific production in the field of communication in Spain and the scientific publishing environment have experienced considerable changes in recent years. **Methodology:** The objective of this research is to analyse through content analysis and bibliometric analysis the evolution of a set of epistemological indicators found in 339 articles published by the RLCS in the period 2004-2013. The indicators include the paradigms, methods and research techniques used, the origin and affiliation of the authors and the fields of communication. **Results and conclusions:** The results show there has been a considerable change in the epistemological indicators analysed and elicit a reflection on communication research in Spain and in the Latin American cultural environment. That research is moving towards convergence with international standards in communication-focused scientific journals, in which a series of strengths and weaknesses is apparent in their current epistemological and methodological foundations.

Keywords: epistemology, paradigm, scientific journals, *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social*, research techniques

Contents: 1. Introduction. 2. Methodology 2.1. Paradigm Types. 2.2. Type of article. 2.3. Research techniques. 2.4. Other criteria analysis. 3. Results. 3.1. Types paradigm. 3.2. Type of articles based on their research methods and techniques. 3.3. Affiliation of authors. 3.4. Representation of disciplinary fields of communication. 4. Discussion and conclusions. 5. Notes. 6. Bibliography.

Translation by **Hilary Robinson**

1. Introduction

One of the avenues to reflect on progress in the epistemological foundations of communication is to scrutinise the different indicators that are present in scientific production. The general aim of this

study is to analyse some of the indicators in the *Revista Latina de Comunicación Social* (RLCS), one of the journals on communication with the most visibility and impact in the Latin American scientific community. The questions which this work seeks to answer are presented against the background of two significant changes in the past decade: on one hand, the increase in scientific production in the field of communication in Spain, which has accompanied the increasing introduction of communication studies at university level (ANECA, 2008); on the other hand, the scientific publishing environment has been influenced in recent years by various factors such as, *inter alia*, the move from paper to the digital world, the multiplication of and, at the same time, concentration in publishing (Castillo, 2011), and institutional consideration of the origin of the publication when assessing teaching staff (Tur *et al.*, 2011; Bermejo, 2012; Giménez, 2013).

As a reflection of this need to understand the overall result of scientific production in communication, interest in studying this in the Spanish national context, as well as its international standing, has grown in the last few years. Different aspects and perspectives have been tackled, including those that analyse communication publications according to criteria such as key terms, classification in databases, citation and impact, productivity, authors, presence in social networks, subject matter, international visibility, editorial perspective, ethics and specialisation (Tur *et al.* 2014).

This concern for investigating scientific production has been present in the RLCS throughout the last decade (for example, León, 2007; Colle, 2009; López-Ornelas, 2010; Piedra 2010; Martínez and Saperas, 2011; Herrero *et al.* 2011; Castillo *et al.*, 2012; Roca y Pueyo, 2012; Tur *et al.*, 2014), as part of the common effort to contribute to understanding the field of communication and driving it forward. In this article, and joining in this general interest, a different perspective is offered, one which is not without difficulty owing to the complexity of the in-depth analyses required of the body of work and which complements those earlier studies. In our case, it involves exploring the epistemological treatment of the content of the articles through methodological indicators, which is an aspect which has not yet been addressed in this type of research.

2. Methodology

In this economic, social and institutional context, our objective is to show the evolution of the RLCS through a set of indicators that allow some of the central epistemological foundations of the field of communication to be defined. One of the avenues to identify the progress and epistemological foundations of a scientific field is to analyse the type of research undertaken by the members of that scientific community. A scientific discipline is defined not only by the problems tackled in its research but also by the methods chosen to solve them (Saracevic, 1992).

This is reflected in the related scientific production appearing in publications, among which scientific journals have a prominent role. Among these, master journals influence the type of research fields that garner the greatest interest within the knowledge area through an induced prescription effect (Pontille and Torny, 2010). From this perspective, according to both more traditional indicators – such as inclusion and position in JCR indexations, international databases (DOAJ, etc.) and national systems (DICE, IN-RECS, etc.)– and other bibliometric and cybermetric indicators of undoubted interest – such as the H index (Pablos *et al.* 2013)– the RLCS is a master communication-oriented scientific journal located in our international idiomatic and cultural context, which means it is well-placed to allow us to understand the prevailing flows and trends in research in the communication field. This is all the more necessary in the scientific field of communication due to the current process of mutation and construction of its epistemological foundations.

To explore how its epistemological foundations have evolved, a set of indicators has been selected and applied to the corpus, which comprises the 339 articles published by the RLCS in the past decade, from 2004 to 2013. Our general hypothesis is that there is an epistemological progression in the scientific output published in the RLCS that can be identified through a set of features and methodological indicators. For our analysis of the content of the selected articles, we have used a methodological guide based on proposals from different authors with respect to each of the criteria used. These are specified, in turn, in the paragraphs below.

2.1. Paradigms

In our analysis of the epistemological affiliation of the articles with a certain paradigm, we have adopted the methodological guide created by Morillon, Aldebert and Szafrajzen (2010), which has the advantage of ordering the diverse texts based on the epistemological position either expressed by the authors or deduced from index words they selected. We have also included an analysis of the content of the article with respect to the methodological indicators presented below.

This guide has been completed based on certain categorisations proposed earlier in the field of social and human sciences (Alvesson and Deetz, 1996; Burrell and Morgan (1979); Deetz, 1996; Giroux and Demers, 1998; Hardy and Clegg, 1997; Giroux and Marroquin, 2005; Koenig, 2006, Putnam, 1982) in which there is great interest in using three paradigms called the *functionalist or positivist*, *interpretive* and *critical* paradigmatic approaches (cf. Saladrigas, 2005, for a description from the organisational communication perspective).

This distinction allows some drawbacks, (such as difficulties in the dialogue between researchers) to be solved, particularly in the field of communication; it reflects recent theoretical developments; it is shared by numerous European and American researchers (Fauré and Bouzon, 2010); and, finally, it is operational in the process of identifying the paradigm within a wide range of work from very different fields of communication (Bouzon and Oliveira, 2014). Each of these three perspectives can be described through certain features.

The *functionalist perspective*, also called the empirical-analytic perspective, is associated with the positivist paradigm. With a “ballistic vision of communication”, it considers the social reality in which the communication is registered as a real phenomenon, according to a constructive ontological principle (Le Moigne, 1990) which exists independently from the subject (the “objectivity principle”), with its own laws that are specific to it. The functionalist perspective also includes systemic and dynamic models (i.e. Martín Serrano, 1990, 1991; Piñuel and Lozano, 2006; Fernández Collado, 2001).

In this framework, communication is an integrating factor, an artefact capable of guiding behaviour. One of the premises of the functionalist perspective is the notion of determinism we can observe in the well-known telegraphic model of communication (Shannon and Weaver, 1948), where communication continues to be a message transmission scheme where note will also be taken of the medium, the resources and the result on the recipients.

The authors of the articles falling within this perspective base their work on hypothetical-deductive methodological procedures, giving priority to quantitative and statistical techniques [1]. With it, they

hope to obtain information on the subject matter of the communicational reality analysed and its consequences on individuals.

The *interpretative perspective* adopts a relativist vision of reality. The subjective experiences of the members of the community construct a social reality through the communication processes (Putman, 1982). This intersubjective social construction generates symbolic forums for exchange which endow the culture with content. This perspective is more interested in gaining a thorough understanding of the communication processes than in the function that these may have to modify conduct, as happens according to the functionalist perspective.

The methodological procedure preferred in the interpretative perspective is characterised by empirical-inductive research, inductive reasoning based on qualitative data (such as unstructured interviews) or comprehensive, hermeneutic and ethnographic surveys [2]. As pointed out by Alex Mucchielli, this perspective addresses the qualitative data, the observer is integrated into the observation and analysis process and it seeks to understand the unique processes (Mucchielli, 2004: 28).

The *critical perspective* stems from Marxism, the Frankfurt School, fundamentally Habermas (1972) and the work of Foucault (1979). This perspective was defined by Horkheimer as an attitude characterised by total distrust towards the rules of behaviour that social life, as it is organised, offers to the individual.

The authors that adopt this perspective investigate communication processes in sociopolitical frameworks of domination, in which the power relationships are asymmetric. It calls into question contemporary capitalism and is interested in emancipation strategies. The articles from this perspective, interested in disentangling the ideological mechanisms of power, adopt perspectives of holistic and qualitative analysis [3]. They do not tend to use empirical procedures and when they use data, they tend to cite secondary sources.

Since the 1990s, the critical perspective has emerged forcefully in countries such as France (Golsorkhi *et al.*, 2009), and in some master communication journals such as *Communication et Organisation* it represents 23% of the articles published in the last ten years, or 18% in the Brazilian journal *Organicom* (Bouzon and Oliveira, 2014). Furthermore, it has a considerable presence in Latin America. As stated by Saladrigas (2005), the Mexican researcher Guillermo Orozco asserted in 1997 that it was a challenge to face, from the communication perspective, alternative forms of leadership that lead to remedying institutional asymmetries and to improving democratic governance (Orozco, 1997).

Other Latin American researchers have underlined different aspects of this critical perspective, such as the Uruguayan researcher Gabriel Kaplún (2001), when considering the transformational dimension of identification of contradictions, or the Argentinean researcher Cristina Baccin (2003), who considers the need to incorporate the socio-political dimension in the field of institutional communication as a critical agent. This critical perspective, as we shall see below, is also present in the RLCS at the beginning of the decade analysed.

These three epistemological perspectives which we have just synthesised, far from showing the immaturity of the epistemological field of communication, are complementary visions of

Communication and demonstrate the complexity facing our mastery of scientific knowledge among the social sciences and, therefore, they all contribute to its enrichment.

Without ignoring the existence of works that are in mixed or readjusted epistemological areas (Girod and Perret, 1999), the use of this epistemological classification guide has the advantage of placing analysis in three significant, clearly distinguishable epistemological fields and does not interfere with positions that introduce other possible formulations, including the constructionist convention (which, in turn, can encompass manifold options such as those from the work of P. Berger and T. Luckmann, Y. Chevalier, B. Delforce, G. Derville, J.-L. Le Moigne, J. Piaget, J. Searle, P. Watzlavick, etc.). As Le Moigne states, the “constructivist” notion can be interpreted in different ways (Le Moigne, 1990: 85):

“Researchers around the world contribute to the development of this epistemological building that we, currently, call [...] 'epistemology of complexity', according to E. Morin, 'epistemology of conception', according to H. Simon, 'derived info-genetic epistemology', according to G. Bateson, 'tectological epistemology', according to A. Bogdanov, 'radical constructivist epistemology', according to E. von Glasersfeld, ... terms that will soon be announced to be 'neo-constructivist epistemologies'.”

Consequently, the use of classification in the three epistemological fields makes it possible both to start from a theoretic basis that builds on it and, no less important within the framework of this article, to be a framework for the operational analysis of the corpus of articles.

This paradigm analysis, among other things, promotes reflection among authors to explain the epistemological field in which their work is situated. As pointed out by Alex Mucchielli, “researchers must be conscious of their models if they do not become a prisoner of their unconscious mindsets, which lead them to simply address ambiguous and inconsistent issues” (Mucchielli, 2000: 77).

From the point of view of the epistemological construction of the field of communication, analysing the paradigms in the corpus allows the paradigms used, and their respective presence in the scientific production as a whole, to be identified.

Finally, each of these paradigms can be identified based not only on the theoretical assumptions handled, the references and the authors but also through the methodological dimensions described in the following sections.

2.2. Type of article

Another interesting feature of this triple paradigmatic analysis is that it allows the research work to be situated according to the methodological resources used in the process of enquiring and contributing knowledge. Therefore, we have introduced a methodological indicator concerning the type of article published based on the methods and techniques used to handle the content presented in each of the articles in the corpus.

Indeed, depending on the scientific field we are focussing on, we can find different ways of classifying articles. As stated by Raïche and Gaudreault (2014), there is a something of a general consensus on the existence of two major categories of scientific articles: empirical articles and theoretical articles. The former are characterised by the presentation of results deriving from

collected data based on the application of a technique or instrument. The organisation of these follows a well-defined structure, which is common to many sciences and areas of knowledge.

The definition in the latter case is subject to great controversy. Raïche and Gaudreault (2014) make a distinction between five types of theoretical articles: *relevance analysis* articles aim to identify unresolved problems or research issues; *conceptual analysis* articles seek to define concepts; articles using *knowledge synthesis* attempt to establish the state of the art with regard to a topic of research (the synthesis is not limited to establishing findings within the articles, but rather presents, with sufficient detail, the objectives, methodologies and results obtained); the fourth type of theoretical article would be the development of a model or a theory; finally, a *methodological development* article pursues the objective of improving some methodological tool to allow subsequent empirical research to be constructed based on the tool.

Beyond this double classification, with its respective subcategories, there are some common generic typologies that are applicable to numerous fields. According to Baiget and Torres-Salinas (2013), scientific articles can be divided into four types: research; review (*state of the art*); theoretic (without carrying out experiments); and comment-criticism of another article.

2.3. Research techniques

Thirdly, we have analysed the corpus to identify the techniques used. As stated by Abadal (2006), depending on the authors, many different research techniques can be singled out, including observation, questionnaires, interviews, the Delphi method, case studies, content analysis, interpretation of texts and experimental or quasi-experimental study (Järvelin-Vakkari, 1990; Blake, 1994; Dimitroff, 1995). One of our objectives is to find out the techniques that appear in the RLCS and if there has been any change in distribution over the past decade.

2.4. Other criteria for analyses

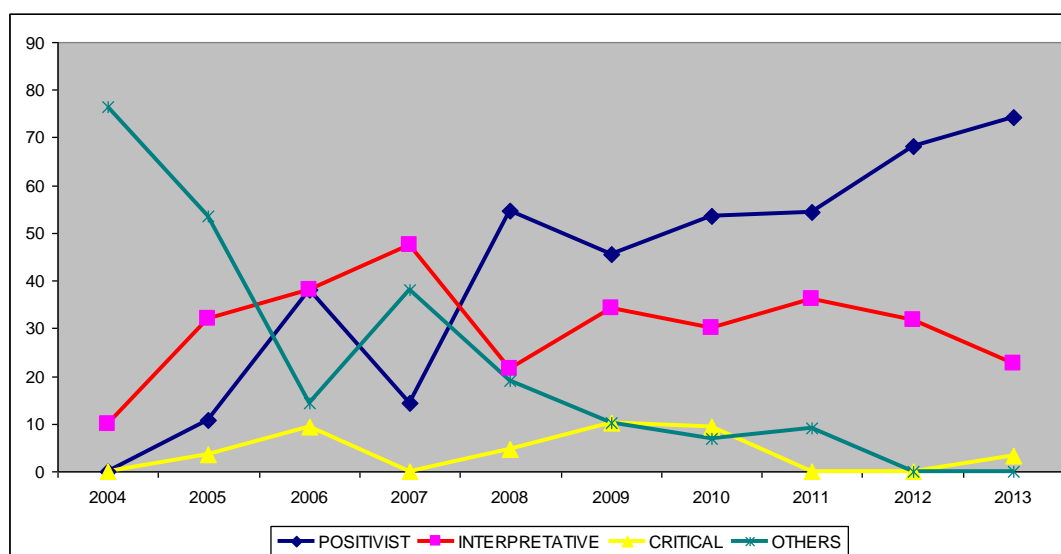
Finally, and additionally to the previous epistemological analysis, three indicators have also been included: author affiliation by university and country, distribution of articles according to the disciplinary fields of the communication and the origin of the bibliographic references. These indicators are of interest to the RLCS as they allow information to be yielded as to its evolution over the decade; they are also interesting as regards the development of research in our Latin American cultural environment and the possible links of its scientific community.

3. Results

3.1. Types of paradigm

Over the period 2004-2013, the presence of the different paradigms in the corpus evolved. We have added a fourth category to the three classification categories corresponding to the three paradigms already described. We have called the fourth category *Others*. It corresponds to work that is not included in any of the other three categories, either because it is work that takes elements from two or more paradigms or because the articles do not allow them to be linked to one paradigm or another (Figure 1). The category called *Others* is the largest at the beginning of the period (76.6% of the total number of articles in 2004) but gradually declines to the point that it disappears at the end of the period.

Figure 1. Evolution of the presence of the different paradigms during the period 2004-2013



The critical perspective is initially the second largest category (13.3%) but it decreases rapidly, becoming marginal by 2013 (3.2%).

The interpretative perspective grows from the beginning of the period and stays in second place regularly from 2007, with a slight decrease in the past three years (Cf. Table 1).

Table 1. Distribution of the articles of the corpus in paradigms in the period 2004-2013

% articles	POSITIVIST	INTERPRETATIVE	CRITICAL	OTHERS
2004	0	10	13.3	76.6
2005	10.7	32.1	3.5	53.6
2006	38	38.1	9.5	14.3
2007	14.3	47.6	0	38.1
2008	54.7	21.4	4.7	19
2009	45.5	34.1	10.1	10.1
2010	53.5	30.2	9.3	7
2011	54.5	36.3	0	9
2012	68.1	31.8	0	0
2013	74.2	22.6	3.2	0

The positivist or functional approach, although absent (0% in 2004) or scarce (10.7% in 2005) in the initial years, grows progressively to become the leading paradigm from the middle of the period (2008). In 2013, 74.2% of the articles fall into this category. Therefore, its progression is the opposite of that experienced by the *Others* category.

At the time of this article, the positivist paradigm is in the majority, together with the interpretative approach. The critical paradigm is irrelevant and the *Others* category has shrunk, becoming immaterial and marginal.

3.2. Types of articles according to research methods and techniques

Based on the distinctions indicated above (section 2.2) and on the analysis of the methodologies and techniques used in the articles of the corpus, a total of five types of article appear which range from those of a more empirical nature (the former two types) to those that are more theoretical (such as the latter two types). A brief description of each of them (including in the final notes some examples from the corpus) is given below:

1. *Presentation of results*: This type of article corresponds to quantitativist research. They introduce hypothesis, design and other positivist methodological features. The data collected can come from content analysis, also through a population-based sample, through questionnaires or experiments [4].

2. *Case study*: This is an investigation focussing on a precise case. It generally uses quantitative data analysis, although possibly analysis and contribution of data. It allows detailed exploration of events over which the researcher has no control and answers questions such as “how?” and “why?” From this perspective, it makes it necessary to start from the background surrounding the analysed fact to refer, subsequently, to the course of events (Yacuzzi, 2002) [5].

3. *Documentary research*: bibliographic review on a specific subject. It often has a historicist approach, covering a relatively wide historical period [6].

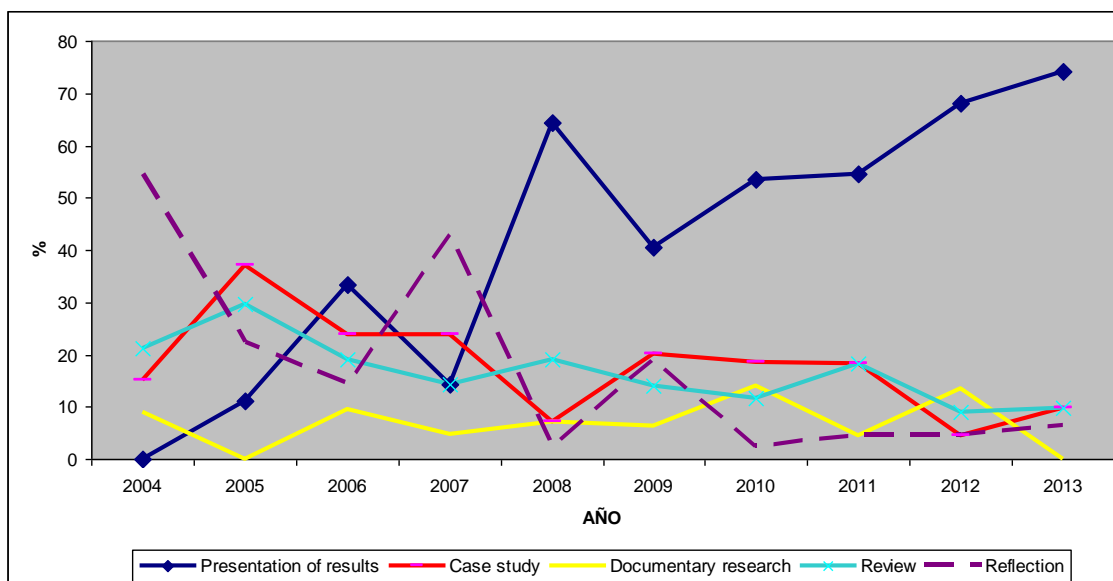
4. *Review* or review article (Abadal, 2006): these are detailed studies that integrate the essential information from a global, integral perspective (Pulido, 1989, cited by Argimón, 1997: 7). This presents what is known about something, a classification proposal, ordering or describing one aspect of communication. It also includes reviews of the state of the art of a communication topic and proposals of analysis methodologies based on this review. It has an educational or narrative dimension for a field, topic or concept. In some cases, it includes educational experiences from one communication subject area [7].

5. *Reflection*: through extensive argumentative reasoning, a specific –and often generic (e.g. freedom of expression)– subject of study is addressed, making it suitable for general considerations. It can be of two types: a) opinion, without sufficient documentary support and corroboration; b) arguments contributing sources, exchange of views, etc. In the body of this type of articles, there is a significant part that, transcending a specific case, is concerned with an ideological critical perspective (of the media and their vehicle of dominant ideologies, in particular) [8].

As Figure 2 shows, the distribution of these five types of articles evolves over the decade. The *Presentation of results* type of article grows very significantly, from 0% of articles in this category in 2004 to 74.2% in 2013, and thus becomes the most common type of article at the end of the analysed period. This is the only type of article that experiences growth like this, as the rest either remain moderately stable or decrease. Therefore both the *Case study* and the *Review* approaches diminish progressively over the period (going from 15.1% to 9.7% and from 21.2% to 9.6%, respectively).

The *Documentary research* approach remains stable and marginal throughout these ten years (representing an average of 6.88% of the articles in the period studied). The *Reflection* type of article, which represents 54.5% of articles in 2004, experiences a sharp fall over the cycle, coming to represent just 6.4% in 2013. In short, it can be stated that qualitative analysis is making way for analysis based on quantitative data. The theoretical reflection is becoming included in studies that contribute data to support their arguments and, possibly, to put forward conceptual proposals.

Figure 2. Distribution of article type during the period 2004-2013



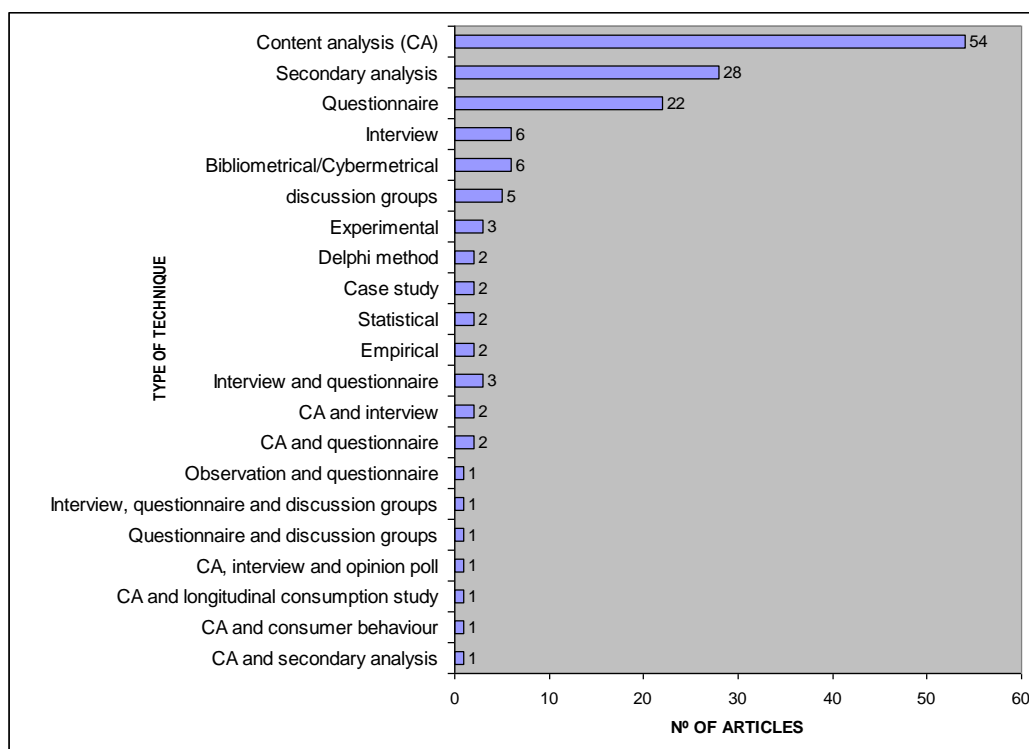
The typology of articles corresponds directly with the techniques used in the articles and contributes to their inclusion in one paradigm category or another. The *interpretative* and *critical* paradigms use qualitative techniques such as undirected interviews, descriptive articles or theoretical reflection. Given the objective of investigating the evolution trends and in view of the dominance of the *Presentation of results* type of article, characteristic of the positivist paradigm, it is useful to know in detail which techniques are used from this last perspective.

As Figure 3 shows, eleven types of research techniques have been employed in the 146 articles using the positivist paradigm approach. Among them, *content analysis* accounts for one-third of the total (54 articles) and includes objective and quantitative studies of documents (in the corpus, above all periodicals and to a lesser extent, advertisements and publicity, television programmes and cinema) and other forms of communication that examine the presence and frequency of patterns of words, phrases and concepts, etc. (Powell, 1997).

Secondary analysis and *questionnaire* techniques constitute the two next most-used techniques (28 and 22 articles, respectively). Remember that in secondary analysis a fresh analysis is made of data and information that has already been published. A new analysis (statistical analysis, logical analysis, etc.) is necessary or data from manifold sources must be gathered together to trace a new context that provides new information (Peritz, 1980: 252). The questionnaire is a structured instrument for collecting primary data from small and large groups of people. The aim is to determine the knowledge, opinions or attitudes of the respondents on various aspects.

The rest of the techniques employed by the authors in this study are barely used (between 2 and 6 articles for each of them). It also has to be observed that in 14 articles, two techniques are used in the same research, and in two cases, three have been used (Cf. Figure 3).

Figure 3. Type of technique used in articles with the positivist paradigm approach (N= 146)



3.3. Bibliographic references

The 339 articles of the corpus include a total of 8551 bibliographic references. The average number of bibliographic references per article throughout the decade is 25. As shown in Table 2, an upward trend is observed, moving from an average of 12.8 references per article in 2004 to an average of 30.8 in 2013.

Table 2. Evolution in the average number of references per article

year	nº of articles	nº of references	Average no. of references
2004	30	386	12,8
2005	28	568	20,3
2006	21	731	34,8
2007	21	463	22
2008	42	1.136	27
2009	79	2.035	25,8
2010	43	1.187	27,6
2011	22	514	23,4
2012	22	575	26,1
2013	31	956	30,8

The distribution of the references by language shows that, throughout the entire period, references in Spanish are in the majority (5,847 references), followed by English (2,350 references). A total of 354 references are in other languages. As a whole, an evolution is discernible. At the beginning, in 2004,

the references in Spanish are in the majority and make up 92% of the total. These gradually decrease, to the benefit of references in English (increasing from 7.2% in 2004 to 42.3% in 2013). As Figure 4 shows, based on the trend throughout the period, references in English grow and progress in a manner opposite of that of references in Spanish. References in other languages grow slightly in the period 2004-2013 although, overall, these languages are in the minority as they represent an average of only 2% in the decade. Figure 5 shows the distribution of the 354 references in other languages appearing in the articles in the corpus.

Figure 4. Evolution of the percentage of references in Spanish, English and other languages between 2004-2013

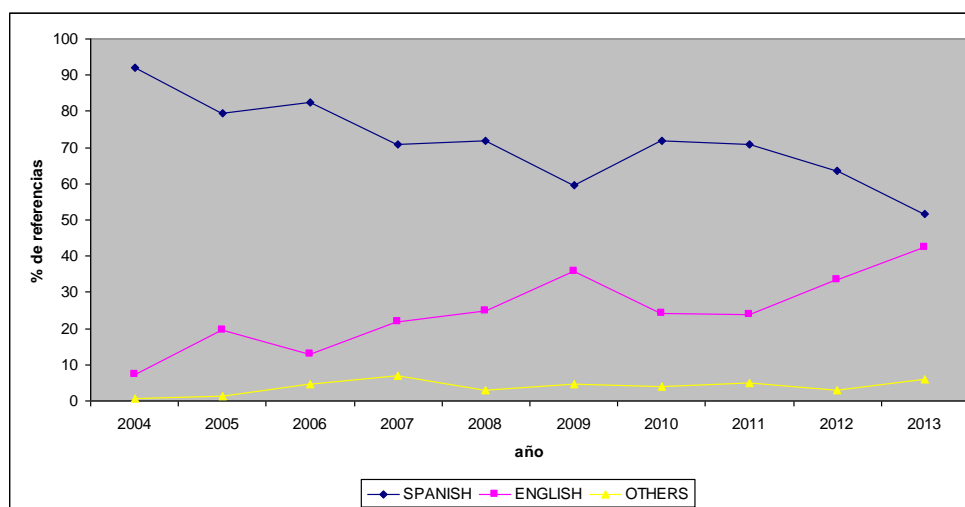
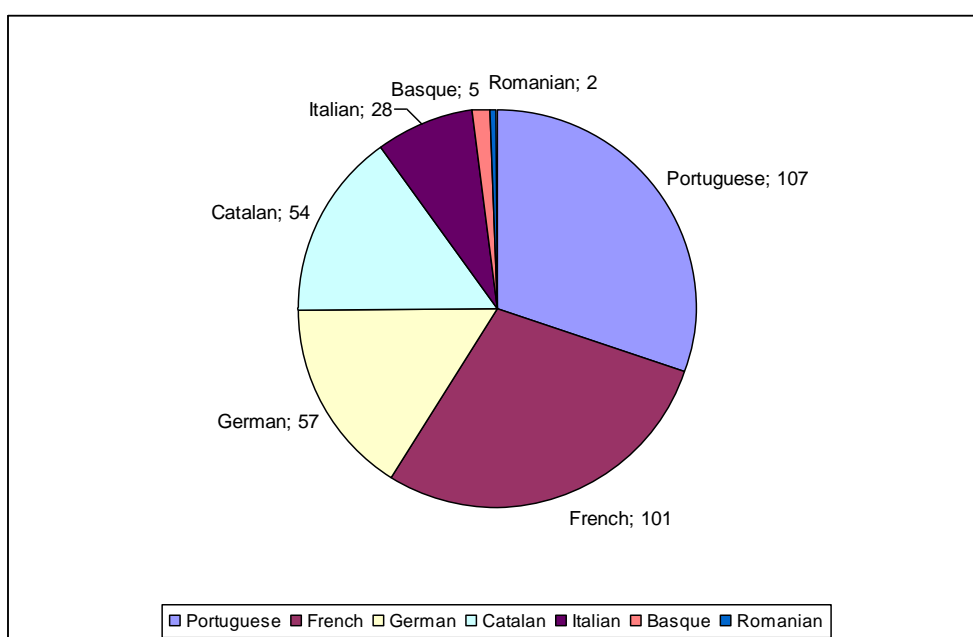


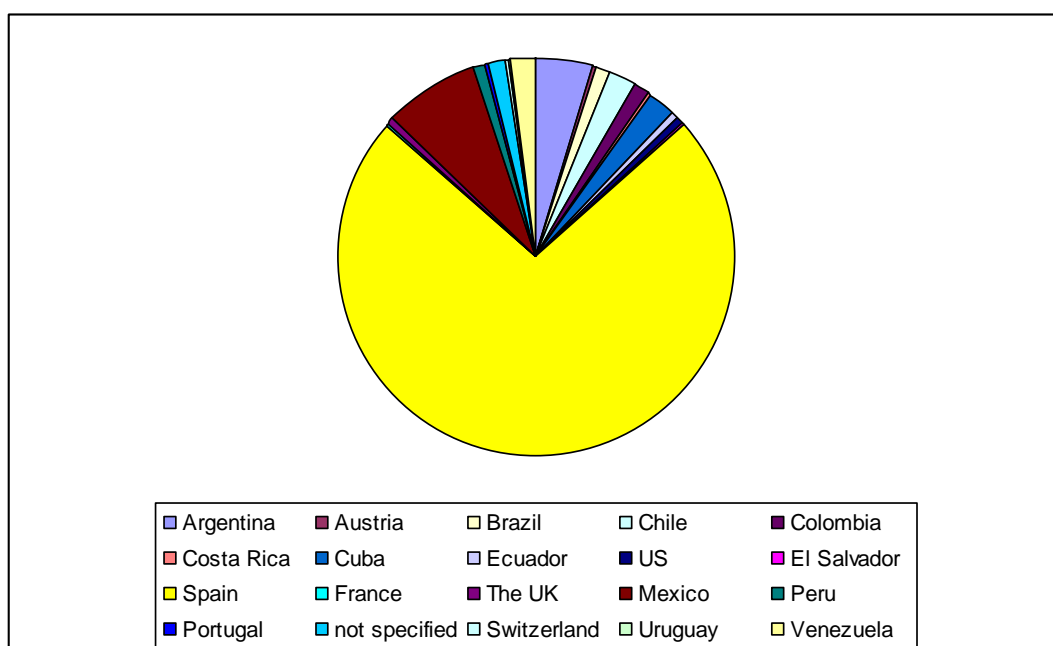
Figure 5. Distribution of the number of bibliographic references between 2004 and 2013 in other languages



3.4. Affiliation of authors

The 353 authors are spread over a total of 19 countries (Figure 6). Although authors from Spain (257), Mexico (27) and Argentina (17) predominate over the rest, the most outstanding result is that we find authors from practically all the Latin American countries: Cuba (8), Chile (7), Venezuela (7), Colombia (5), Brazil (4), Peru (3), Ecuador (2), Costa Rica (1), El Salvador (1) and Uruguay (1). Some European authors are also present –the UK (2), Austria (1), France (1), Portugal (1), Switzerland (1)– and the US (2).

Figure 6. Affiliation of authors by country



If we now observe the trend in affiliation of the authors to universities during the 2004-2013 period (Figure 7), we see that there is an increase in the number of authors affiliated to Spanish universities (passing from 46.6% of the total in 2004 to 77.4% of total articles in 2013). This figure is complemented by increased diversity as regards the affiliation of the authors according to their university of origin. In other words, more and more Spanish universities are represented in the journal.

As Figure 8 shows, overall during the period the average number of articles per university has been decreasing, going from 2.3 in 2004 to 0.7 in 2013, with an average for the overall period of one article per university. This means that if in the years prior to 2004 certain universities were very present in the journal, diversity has developed over time. Consequently, it can be asserted that at the current time, the RLCS publishes articles from all the Spanish universities in the field of communication.

At the same time, a decrease in authors from other universities, particularly in Latin America (changing from 40% of articles in 2004 to 12.9% in 2013), can be observed.

Lastly, there is an increase in the presence of mixed articles at international level, that is, articles involving the collaboration of authors from two or more countries. Therefore, although in 2004 there are no articles with this characteristic, the percentage reaches 9.7% in 2013 (passing from an average of 0.9% between 2004 and 2008 to an average of 5.65% between 2008 and 2013).

Figure 7. Evolution of author affiliation to universities during the period 2004-2013

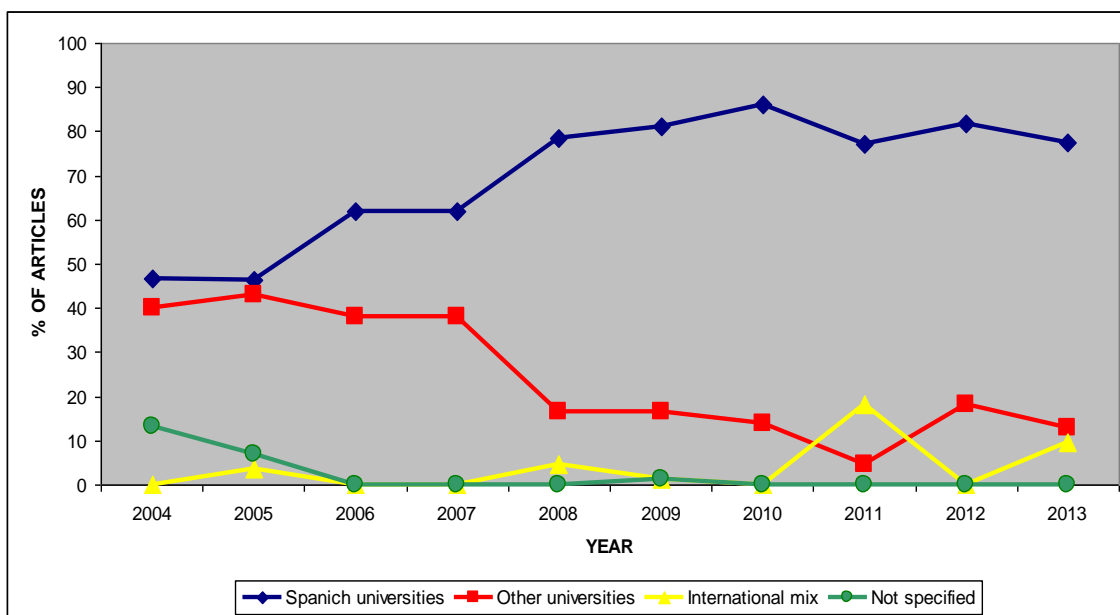
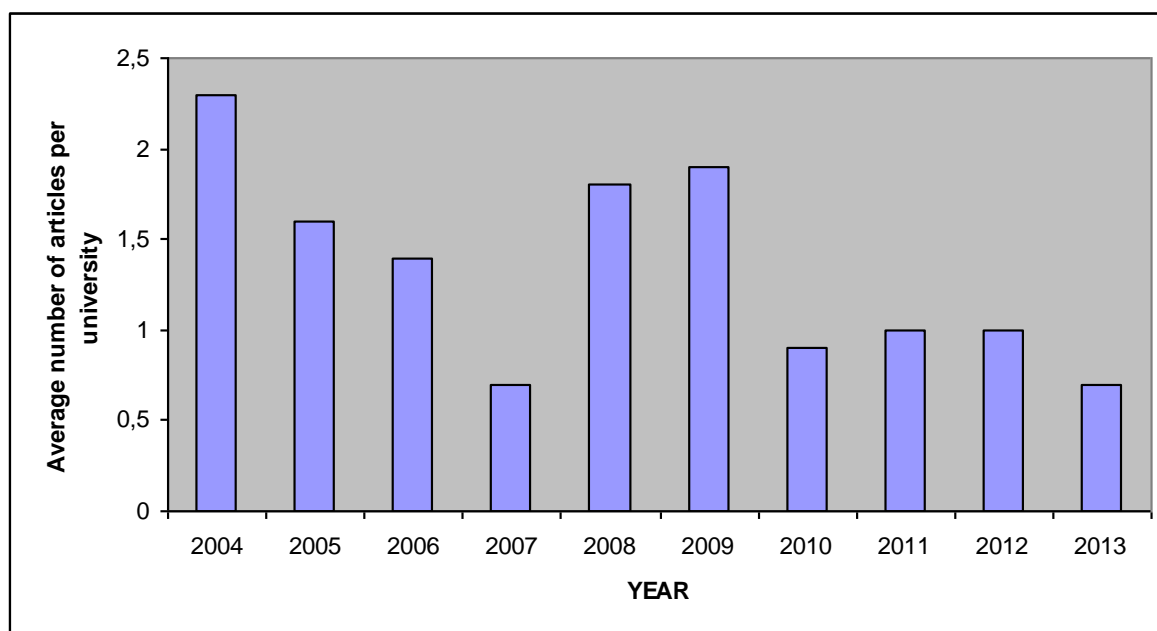


Figure 8. Average number of articles published in the journal based on the affiliation of the authors with Spanish universities

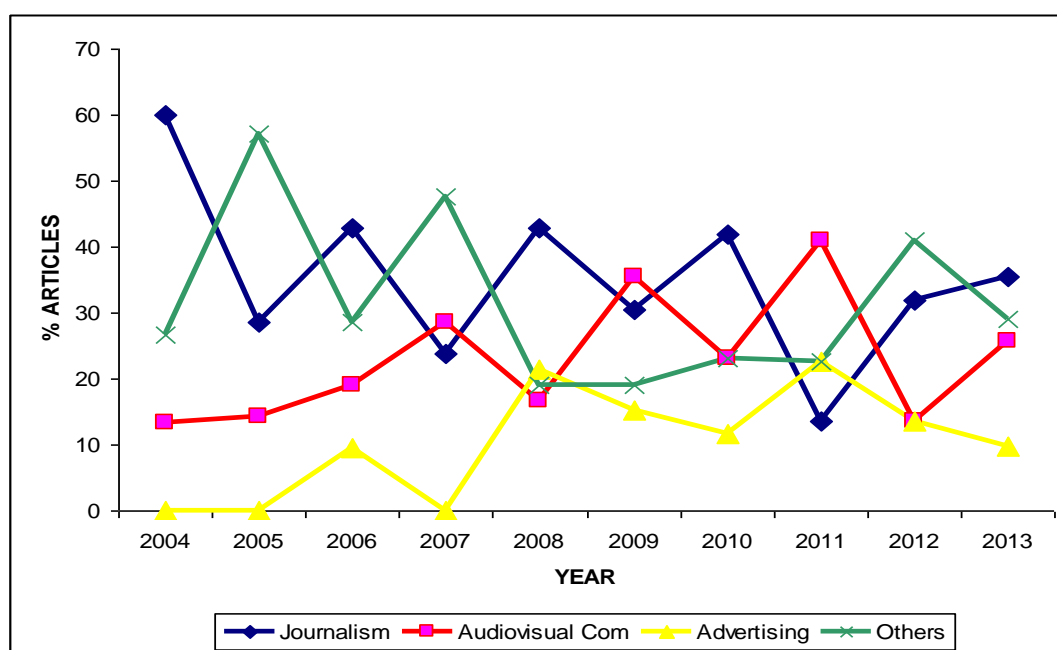


3.5. Representation of the disciplinary fields of communication

As Figure 9 illustrates, at the beginning of the period articles from the field of journalism are the most significant (60% of the total). The field of audiovisual communication is in the minority and that of advertising and public relations is totally absent. However, the balance of the number of articles from these three fields has gradually shifted. In 2013, the fields of journalism, audiovisual communication and others have a similar share and those of advertising and public relations, which were absent, in the past few years as from 2008 rose to an average of 15.7% of the articles.

Consequently, it can be said that the RLCS has changed in the past ten years from being fundamentally a journal for journalism to becoming a communication journal in the strictest sense, as all communication fields are represented in it. This includes not only all the traditional academic disciplinary fields but also emerging trends (e.g. business communication in social networks, online communication, communication on mobile devices). Therefore, a second result regarding the *Others* field is that the RLCS, since the beginning of the period, has placed importance on the new, emerging forms of communication. In 2004, this category represented 26.6% of the total articles, with an average over the period of 31.37% of the total articles.

Figure 9. Distribution of the articles among the fields and areas of communication in the RLCS during the period 2014-2013



4. Discussion and conclusions

The analysis of all the epistemological indicators of the RLCS in the period 2004-2013 has enabled this study to highlight that a process of evolution has occurred in the articles published. The essential features of the process need to be examined to understand the meaning of that development.

First of all, from the point of view of the paradigms used, at the beginning of the cycle most of the articles (76.6%) do not have the characteristics inherent in any of the three dominant paradigms. In some cases it is because the paradigmatic nature of the article cannot be clearly defined based either on its theoretic position or on its methodology. In other cases, the article consists of proposals that

borrow many different paradigmatic components and mix them together. However, this type of article makes way, as from 2008, for articles with epistemological positions that are well-explained and defined in the texts. Also, rapidly, there is a general trend towards the supremacy of the positivist paradigm.

This evolution must not be confused with a ‘natural’ evolution of communication sciences. It must be remembered that other social sciences have evolved in a complex manner. For example, at the end of the 19th century, when psychology embraced the scientific method of ‘hard’ sciences, it became engaged in a process in which its scientific publications moved towards a progressive process of quantification. However, as from the middle of the 20th century and stemming from a certain unease, a portion of the scientific community pointed out that part of the subject of study was being left outside the analysis (Bermejo, 2005).

This began a process leading to the appearance of journals labelled as being ‘qualitative’ (Loseke *et al.* 2007). This debate has lasted until the present day; the discussion has not ended (Bryman, 2007; Mahoney and Goertz, 2006; Sale *et al.*, 2002) and certain journals have placed it centre stage (e.g. the *Journal of Mixed Methods Research*). Since then, in this and other sciences, diverse epistemological approaches co-exist in scientific journals, some of a more qualitative nature, others, more quantitative. Both contribute complementary and necessary aspects for the progress of science (Seale *et al.*, 2007; Denzin and Lincoln, 2005; Guba and Lincoln, 2005).

To cite just one in the field of communication, Arneson (2009) has underlined the axiological differences between the two perspectives, which make them both necessary for the field of communication. As regards the RLCS, at the present time, even while including a significant portion of articles that fall into the quantitative category, it also maintains a percentage of articles of a qualitative nature, included in the interpretative and critical paradigmatic perspectives.

In the case of communication, and within this discussion about the evolution between quantitative and qualitative approaches, there are few studies that have analysed the epistemological structure of scientific journals. The few that exist would indicate that, in communication as well, evolution could be towards complex contexts where the scientific journal market would not follow a single model but where there would be, as well as moving deeper into the paradigmatic models used by the authors, progressive paradigmatic diversification.

Even when the model linked to the fundamentalist and positivist paradigm, which is in the majority in the more influential communication journals in English, is the most widespread, others would be progressing. One example of this would be the comparison between the results we have obtained here for the RLCS in relation with two communication journals which are also master journals in their respective countries (France and Brazil).

According to the data provided by Arlette Bouzon and Ivone de Oliveira in a study using a paradigm analysis methodology similar to the methodology we have used here for the RLCS, both the French journal *Communication and Organisation* and the Brazilian journal *Organicom* have experienced an evolution in paradigms over the past ten years that is precisely the opposite to that we have observed for the RLCS (Bouzon and Oliveira, 2014).

In their case, both the interpretative and the critical paradigm have progressed and are taking space away from the positivist paradigm articles, which are still in the majority. Therefore, it can be said

that the field of communication is evolving, from a paradigm perspective, towards a pattern involving complex research, in which at the current time the positivist paradigm is in the majority. This is the case of RLCS, in which there is clear evolution towards standards of analytic research through analysis of a specific corpus of journalistic, audiovisual or other materials and moving away from opinion, qualitative and interpretative articles which lack an analytic empirical analysis foundation on which to base them.

The *Presentation of results* article thus becomes in the RLCS the type of article that is well adapted to this functionalist perspective. At the end of the period studied, some review articles and articles on the state of the art can still be observed. This demonstrates, at the same time, the need –still experienced by the field of communication– to delimit and define areas of research, particularly those that are emerging in the new hypermedia society.

Even when the evolution in article type in the RLCS is towards presentation of results deriving from the analysis of a corpus, the type of technique used is fairly dependent on some specific techniques, among which content analysis stands out. There is hardly any work with empirical and experimental methodologies (five articles in total), which is unlike North American, British or Dutch communication journals where these techniques are used more frequently.

Taking into account that at the beginning of the period, in 2004, research work based on the treatment of the data collected and processed by the authors was in the minority and has been increasing over the decade, it is expected that the type of data processing is also evolving towards methodologies involving ever more frequently empirical and experimental work, through corroboration of hypotheses, as happened in the English-speaking world. This evolution, if it occurs, would cause part of the research interest devoted to the study of media texts and discourse to change to focus on the users of the media.

Thirdly, another result that indicates the move by scientific production in the RLCS towards the most prominent standards in the English-speaking world is given by the significant increase in bibliographical references in English, to the detrimental of those in Spanish. It can be said therefore that Spanish scientific production is increasingly interwoven with the sphere of the international market.

Fourthly, the affiliation of authors according to their national origin clearly indicates that the RLCS reflects its title well as it publishes work by authors from all the Latin American nations, without excluding authors from elsewhere, such as Europe or the US. This phenomenon of widespread origins is also supported by the analysis made of the origins of the Spanish authors. The analyses presented above have clearly demonstrated that throughout the decade the spread of authors across all the Spanish universities was widening. It can thus be said that the RLCS has progressively become more international and, at the same time, has included an increasing number of Spanish universities.

This information contrasts with the information provided by Roca and Pueyo (2012) as regards the journal *Zer* (although with the proviso that it is a study covering the period 1996-2005 and therefore we do not know its possible subsequent development). These authors indicated that just three universities produced half of the articles for the journal *Zer*.

This type of concentration, in the case of the RLCS, has been disappearing over the past decade and at the end of that period there is a wide range of author affiliations. Furthermore, if collaboration between universities is minimal in the analysis conducted by Roca and Pueyo (2012), in our data there is an evolution towards an increase in collaboration and in international presence, which is still minimal, just as in the analysis by Roca and Pueyo.

Finally, in fifth place and in line with the above, the RLCS has been augmenting and broadening the disciplinary field of the published articles. While at the beginning of the period journalism was the dominant field, at the current time all the disciplinary fields –audiovisual communication and advertising and public relations– are equally representative (without forgetting new and emerging niches and fields in communication).

Therefore, in conclusion, the RLCS is moving towards standards of publication of research based on data and use of positivist methodologies. It is a Latin American journal, publishing work by authors from all over Latin America but also of other nationalities. It is a communication journal, insofar as all the fields in that area are present in it.

One issue, which can be addressed in the future, will be to find out the place that will be given to the approaches from the interpretative and critical paradigms, based on the evolutionary process that we have outlined here and whether they are to be addressed from empirical methodology approaches, and therefore subsumed in a broadened functionalist paradigm or whether they will maintain the article structure they have had in the past. The answer to this issue will not be lacking in interest as it will be linked to the epistemological conceptions held of communication in coming years.

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5. Notes

[1] Algunos ejemplos de artículos del corpus de la RLCS de la perspectiva funcionalista: Igartúa (art992, 2013), Chavero et al. (art994, 2013), Pérez et al. (art996, 2013), Deltell et al. (art997, 2013).

[2] Algunos ejemplos de artículos del corpus de la RLCS de la perspectiva interpretativa: Tabachnik (art701, 2007), Roca (art796, 2008), Blanco (art857, 2009), Echevarría (art935, 2011), Pena (art953, 2012).

[3] Algunos ejemplos de artículos del corpus de la RLCS de la perspectiva crítica: Mengo (art501, 2005), Gómez (art610, 2006), Frankenberg (art768, 2008), Bergés (art897, 2010).

[4] Algunos ejemplos del tipo de artículo de la categoría *Presentación de resultados* del corpus de la RLCS y tipo de técnica: experimental (Soto et al., art853, 2009), empírico (Parra et al., art855, 2009), análisis de contenido (Camacho, art865, 2009), análisis secundario (Papí y Feliu, art933, 2011), entrevistas y encuesta (Macía y Herrera, art868, 2009), análisis de contenido y estudio longitudinal de consumo (González, art882, 2010), cuestionario (Arras et al., art927, 2011), método Delphi (Baladrón, art937, 2011; San Juan et al., art995, 2013), análisis de contenido cuantitativo estadístico (Roca y Pueyo, art957, 2012), análisis bibliométrico (Castillo et al., art955, 2012).

[5] Algunos ejemplos del tipo de artículo de la categoría *Estudio de caso* del corpus de la RLCS: Blanco (art857, 2009), Montserrat et al. (art961, 2012).

[6] Algunos ejemplos del tipo de artículo de la categoría *Búsqueda documental* del corpus de la RLCS: Pérez (art760d, 2008), López de Aguilera (art794, 2008), Núñez et al. (art901, 2010).

[7] Algunos ejemplos del tipo de artículo de la categoría *Recensión o artículo de revisión* del corpus de la RLCS: de carácter didáctico (Álvarez, art760c, 2008), expositivo (Balaguer, art775, 2008), descriptivo (Bonaut y Grandío, art859, 2009).

[8] Algunos ejemplos del tipo de artículo de la categoría *Reflexión* del corpus de la RLCS: Fouce (art832, 2009), Almirón (art845, 2009), Campos (art970, 2013), Villanueva et al. (art991, 2013).

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