

Introduction

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Black holes of communication

Scientific communication and meta-research

Guest-Edited Special Issue:

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It is a broadly accepted fact that reflection on the disciplines is almost a «locus communis» of the processes of constitution and affirmation of these same disciplines, especially in the field of the social sciences. It reflects a call to consciousness of the limits, methods and the very people that integrate a discipline and, as the discipline's first cry, it becomes from that moment on a constant that accompanies and depicts the evolution of these disciplines.

Knowledge of the internal dynamics, size, demography, topics and methodology of a discipline means there is a community that is aware of itself as a clearly differentiated disciplinary field capable of fixing limits in terms of the original specialism, and which also carries out research that is sufficiently relevant to be studied firstly by its own members and then eventually by others; in other words, it has to attain critical mass. Secondly, that there is an interest in observing the behavior of the discipline from different perspectives – Communication, Bibliometry or Sociology, to give just three examples- which with their different viewpoints and methodologies aid the understanding of how the discipline has evolved, how it relates to other disciplines, how it uses the new scientific communication tools and what its distinctive features are.

This edition of «Comunicar» explores this perspective and indicates the keys to research on Communication. The title of this edition, «The black holes of Communication», is to be interpreted as a call for internal reflection on the discipline and an invitation to identify those aspects of scientific communication, research or evaluation that still need to be developed or improved. This latest edition looks at some of these aspects although there are undoubtedly many more; and it is important to recognize the number of original contributions submitted to the journal and to thank those reviewers whose work is never sufficiently acknowledged who have to reject many manuscripts, not for lack of quality or interest but for shortage of space.

The theme of this edition originated at a roundtable meeting entitled «Communicative meta-investigation in Spain: bibliometric and methodological analyses applied to Communication studies», coordinated by Miguel Vicente (University of Valladolid) at the Congress of the Spanish Association of Communication Research in 2011. The organizers and speakers could clearly see how far these issues were the subject of analysis and, above all, how they attracted the interest of Communication researchers. These issues dealt with the profile of scientific production in Communication, the patterns of scientific collaboration and citation, the international scope of the research, the methodologies used in research, the role of journals in scientific communication and the opinion of experts on Spanish scientific journals.

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The aim of the studies on science and its disciplines is not merely descriptive, although this type of work is neither negligible nor unnecessary. To know what type of scientific collaboration is occurring between researchers, how and what type of documents are cited in a discipline, how these patterns change over time, the evolution of the impact of the main journals on the databases, both new and original, the analysis of the emergence of new themes or technologies are just some of the results of these studies and they transcend the simple diagnostic; they enable us to observe the discipline critically, compare or relate it to others and identify the intrinsic characteristics of its research. The dynamics of research and the interaction between research and social networks in the field have also come under study. We have new knowledge on the links between Communication and related disciplines such as Education, and on the emergence of new concepts and/or topics of investigation. There are also data to enable us to know whether the response to the requirements of scientific policy is adequate, the level of research in one country when compared to others or the importance of other channels of communication.



In the field of scientific evaluation, this is particularly important given that the knowledge of the discipline ought to allow for the establishment of strong assessment criteria; the scientific community will then have data and evidence to defend a model that is appropriate for their discipline. And scientific policy managers can also use these analyses as a source of useful information for knowing whether investment in the area –in human and financial resources- is yielding the expected results, if the discipline is competitive at international level or if it responds to problems that need to be resolved. This is a particularly important point, even though it often gets obscured. As society benefits directly or indirectly from the results of research, so the aims of that investigation are attained. And as the perception that society has of science and scientists becomes more favorable, so it will lead to greater financial support for research.

This is the general framework of the first three articles of this edition. The works by Fernández-Quijada and Masip, De Filippo and Escribà and Cortiñas offer a detailed vision of the state of research on Communication in Spain in terms of production, scientific collaboration, international projection and visibility. All the variables show a positive evolution, as these authors describe, and this is true for all the Social Sciences. There is a certain reactive evolution –when faced with the evaluation processes- but also

some weak points that the scientific community must deal with and which will be hard to overcome without a firm and realistic policy of support for investigation and the internationalization of scientific activity. At the same time, these works clearly reveal the importance of the scientific journal as a key element in the evaluation of research and the influence that certain sources of information have on publication policy and the job of investigators. By adopting a critical stance regarding these habits, it is worth asking whether Open Access, the academic search engines and abusive practices of certain publishing groups (see «The Cost of Knowledge» initiative) are starting to have an impact on the oligopoly of Web of Knowledge and Scopus, arousing the interest of authors and reviewers in alternative communication channels and in more open indicator tools than those already mentioned, topics which are tackled in some of the texts in this edition.

The fourth article, written by Delgado & Repiso, studies the Google Scholar Metrics open work tool as an alternative to the mediation of scientific activity and its impact, relating it to WoS and Scopus. Undoubtedly, this article is indicative of a sign of opening and renewal in impact measurement and the types of publications generated in research, and these can and should be evaluated. The article by Torres, Cabezas and Jiménez on Almetrics also opens the way for another type of indicator that differs from the more traditional bibliometrics, though it is clear that the new metrics proposed have emerged, as in the case just mentioned, from the new possibilities offered by the Net and are still an unconsolidated alternative in Communication.

Casanueva and Caro propose an analysis of the social network which operates, de facto, among tribunal members who judge doctoral theses, emphasizing the value of these interactions above those less frequent or non-existent exchanges in scientific publications. They put forward an interesting perspective on a dimension of scientific activity rarely taken into account.

Another set of articles presents approaches by topic, which include a work by Vázquez on the arrival of new dissemination formats for investigation, specifically the videoarticle. Ana Milojević, Jelena Kleut and Danka Ninković contribute a study of the emergence of the concept of interactivity as a research theme; and Marián Navarro and Marta Martín write about the now classic subject of women and advertising, approached from the perspective of various media whose very technical features seem to determine how much attention is paid to this aspect of communication.

Another article which is novel for its proposal in terms of this perspective of studies of a topical nature and for the study object is that presented by Mañana and Sierra who analyze the relation between Communication and Education by the exchange of citations between their respective journals. It aims to measure the degree of closeness or remoteness of the relation of a discipline to others that are theoretically affiliated. The method used shows how bibliometric indicators measure more than just the impact factor, and that they have some very interesting applications which are relatively unknown and underexplored.

Topic-based analyses are necessarily partial, and in this edition on black holes there is sure to be one black hole that remains in the dark in terms of which topics are most written about and which methodologies are the most applied in the field of Communication, and whether or not we can perceive a «hardening» of the same. This in itself could be the subject of an entire edition.

Regardless of the specialism, the methodological resources of each researcher or even the degree of their success, we all develop our activity within the same «ecosystem» in which we investigate, get finance (or we try to), we produce, we cite and are cited, we collaborate with other researchers and participate in editing journals, we review for and our work is reviewed by journals and agencies. We share this ecosystem with other investigators and it should be of common concern to know how our disciplines function and develop, which will make us more aware of our potential and limitations, and enable us to improve scientifically.

We trust that all readers of «Comunicar» will find this selection of articles on just one part of this ecosystem to be revealing, and that this edition will be of use, be constructive and a pleasure to read.